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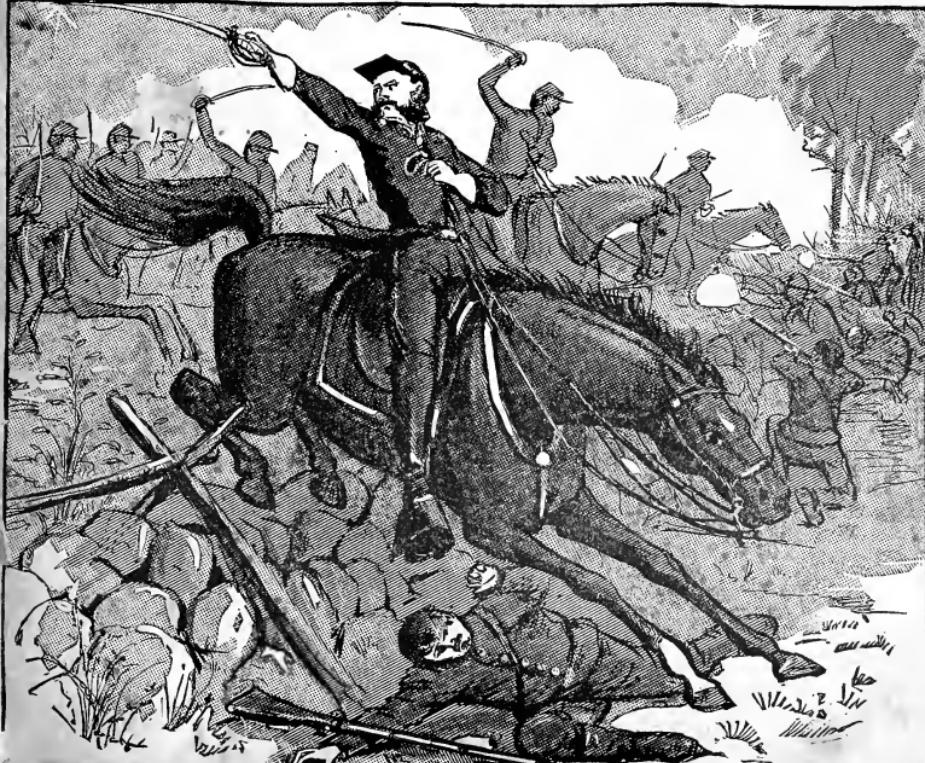
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Fremont, the Pathfinder; or, Bullet and Bayonet on Missouri Battlefields.

By Captain Mark Wilton.



Zagonyi's famous charge.

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FREMONT, THE PATHFINDER;

—OR—

Bullet and Bayonet on Missouri Battlefields.

BY CAPT. MARK WILTON.

CHAPTER I.

THE AMBUSH.

There was a bright flashing in the air, a steady tramp as of many feet, a clear, terse command, and a body of men came marching through a rocky pass. The bright sun struck upon polished rifle-barrel and glistening bayonet, which sent out strange lights here and there, and in every point and feature the appearance of the men bespoke stern resolution.

It was a time of excitement and warlike alarm in Missouri, this memorable day of July, 1861; but the men to whom attention has been called were, saving their leader, without uniforms. Dressed as ordinary citizens, they would have looked peaceful enough, had it not been for their array of weapons, their stern faces, and their military precision of movement.

Eighty men they counted, and at their head was a fine-looking man who seemed to be about their years, though he was not more than twenty-five years of age, while some of those who followed had many threads of gray in their beards and hair.

"Silence in the ranks!" he commanded, sharply, as two of his men began hurling sarcastic badinage the length of a line. "No loud talking."

The pass was a dark and gloomy place, despite the fact that it was just then touched by the rays of the sun. The rocks on either side were black, moist from a recent shower, and scarcely further apart than the width of a man's shoulder.

Captain Barlow scanned the front with a keen gaze. He expected no opposition to his march, but affairs were very uncertain in and about Missouri at that day.

This uncertainty was soon shown.

Without any warning a roar ran along the face of the rocks—a sound once heard not easily forgotten, for it was that of muskets—and Captain Barlow, instinctively looking around after a shower of bullets whistled past his head, saw the ground plentifully covered with dead and dying of his gallant command.

Another moment, and the rocks seemed to be alive with men. High above their heads they were on both sides, and the bleak walls bristled with muskets.

The little band had marched into an ambush!

It was no time for tedious formalities. Barlow read the truth and planned the remedy. He saw his remaining men standing in consternation, but he knew their mettle and what he might expect.

"Fire!"

The curse command broke fiercely from his throat; his sword, glistening as a ray of the sun fell through a break in the rocky wall, pointed to the men above, and with startling quickness the order was obeyed.

Up went the weapons—the majority of them long rifles—and a terrible volley went hurtling through the air. No systematic discharge was that volley; each man had fired after his own fashion, but the effect was most terrible to the ambusheurs.

There was a commotion all along the rocks, and men were seen to clutch blindly at the spurs of stone, at each other, or at empty guns.

Vain attempt for many of them, and a thrill ran through Barlow's nerves as several slipped over the edge, and, after whirling for a minute in space, fell on the soil of the roadway with a dull thud.

Strange to say, the little band, though surprised, had struck back harder than they had been hit.

Barlow, however, was not done. He recognized the men who had thus ambushed him. They were Confederates, and he commanded his men to cease, because they had taken sides with the defenders of the Union.

"Up the rocks—charge!"

Once more Barlow's voice rang out sharply, and the gallant Missourians responded with a yell and a rush. The rocks arose steeply before them, but they were almost as skillful as chamois hunters. They struck the base and began to climb amid a scattering volley, Barlow leading the way on one side and Dave Harney on the other.

"For the Union and Sigel—strike!" shouted Captain Max; and then he deftly dodged a blow from a clubbed musket and sent his sword home to the man who would have struck him.

The impetuosity of his men had carried them quickly up, and then the fight became general all along the rocks.

The sound of revolvers, the clashing of opposing steel and the sharp snap of furious men made a strange scene to the pass. The deadly enemies grappled and fought, aiming to kill or throw each from the rocks.

"For the Union and Sigel!"

Again and again the cry sounded on the air, and before those hard fighters the Confederates gave ground.

Captain Barlow was always found where the destruction was the greatest. A fine swordsman, he was battling with a blade wet with blood.

One thing he marked, even then. The Confederates seemed without a leader. No commanding voice arose to encourage or direct them; it seemed to be each man for himself.

Suddenly the confusion turned to alarm, and the enemy began to give ground rapidly. They were pressed, and then the whole body turned and fled in disorder.

Pursued for some distance, others fell by the way, but Barlow finally called off his men and all returned to the scene of the ambush.

A decisive victory had been won, but at a cost which threw a gloom over the whole command.

Thirteen of their eighty men lay dead in and beside the pass, and others were severely wounded. To offset this loss was the fact that nearly twice as many Confederates had fallen.

Barlow, who had been glancing about, saw something which at once held his attention.

Near the base of the rocks was a man in the uniform of a Confederate captain. He walked to his side and looking down on the still, white body, he understood who the enemy had lost without a leader's voice.

"This is a sad and strange business," he said, aloud. "I do not understand why these men were here to intercept us. Was it chance, or—or was there a traitor among those who knew we would to-day march to join Sigel? So cunning and systematic an ambush bespeaks careful study. Can it be our plans were carried to our enemies?"

"It looks mighty like it," answered one of his men.

"What could have done it?" Barlow sharply asked.

"Now you ask too much. Only a few beside our own number knew of our intentions."

"I believe they were known by one too many. Drayton, if I ever know such to be a fact, I will tear the traitor limb from limb. Look on these dead men! They were our neighbors—almost our brothers. Did they fall through the treachery of some vile dog who betrayed us? I must and will know."

"A sad work."

"The saddest ever seen in Jasper county. And this is the Fourth of July! Ah! we have little occasion to rejoice."

Just then, Dave Harney came up, and saluted his superior.

"The bodies are all cared for, cap'n," he said.

"Then let us get in motion once more," said Barlow, with a start. "Stay! this officer may have important papers on his person."

He bent over the Confederate captain and searched his pockets. In one he found a package of folded documents which he put away for examination at a future time.

Then the little command formed into ranks, and moved on, leaving the Confederate dead where they had fallen.

Who, and what were the men thus led by Max Barlow on that July day of 1861?

The civil war, which at that time was startling the people of the United States, was beginning to show its venom.

From Texas to Maryland the Southerners were gathering in the fray. They had received a call to "free" the Union, they had fired upon and captured Fort Sumter, and on all sides were seen and heard signs of the great struggle doomed to occur.

In Missouri, all was confusion. Some men were for the Union and others against it. Families were divided, and brothers in arms against each other, while those who would have remained neutral were in an unenviable position.

Companies and regiments, loyal and dis-

loyal, were forming in all places, and in the field were rival regiments composed of regulars and volunteers.

In June, General Nathaniel Lyon, that gallant Union leader, drove the Confederate forces of Price and Jackson from Booneville; but they at once turned their faces south, and sought to form their own forces and that of Ben McCulloch into one united army which should rule that part of the country.

There, however, they found a new opponent. Colonel Franz Sigel, ever vigilant to guard the interests of the Union, did not fail to perceive the danger of the coalition of those who would tear down the old flag.

Consequently, although possessed of but a handful of men, compared with the numbers of the Confederate chiefs, he resolved to strike at least one of them before a junction was effected.

So, on this Fourth of July, Sigel was marching to the rescue, who was at Pool's Prairie near Neosho, and the prospect of a battle grew great.

The blow did not fall where expected, however; for Price fled from his quarters to Elk Mills, some miles further south.

Then Sigel resolved to attack Jackson, who was further north, and his little army was accordingly headed for that point.

That evening, he encamped with his force on the south fork of Spring River, only waiting for a needed rest to push on toward Lamar, and strike at Governor Jackson.

CHAPTER II.

UNDER FIRE.

Captain Max Barlow and his handful of men were marching to join Sigel, and render all possible aid in this crisis. They loved the Union, of which each and every one was a son by birth, and were willing to risk limb and life in the work of upholding the old flag.

All were from one neighborhood, all bound together by ties of friendship. Barlow was one of the most popular, but connection, but a majority of mad had never made him a leader from the day when he used to array his schoolmate friends on the prairie, and march to the whistling of Jim Otis, with crooked sticks for muskets.

Fifteen years had passed since that day. Barlow had become a man; and, in the summer of 1861, there was ample need for him to do more than play soldier.

When he and his loyal friends had joined hands, and resolved to march to the aid of Colonel Sigel, Max had been made captain by popular demand, as a result of these preliminary movements, we find them that day before the battle on their way.

After the ambush and fight in the pass, they saw no more trouble, and a little after dark they reached the camp of Sigel.

Barlow was soon before the colonel. Formalities were little observed at that hour, and the Union leader, so embarrassed by a lack of proper aid, was glad enough to enlist all loyal men who would come to his standard.

The two men were on the open field, and Barlow made his historical speech.

"Take your place in the camp somewhere, captain, and on the morrow march as you see fit. After the battle, if we survive, there will be a chance for formal enlistment, and I will give you all the chance I can. As I said a moment ago, I have heard the name of Barlow before."

"I am anxious to form a party of independent rangers," said Max.

"There will soon be material enough. Men are arousing everywhere," he replied.

"Indeed they do," soberly replied Sigel. "Look at the situation here. Jackson, Price and McCulloch are roving rough-shod and making life uncertain. They must be beaten off or our chances are desperate."

"You have saddled a big horse, kurnel."

A new voice broke in upon them, and they turned to see a man who did not seem at all troubled by the fact that he had interrupted officers of the army. In fact, he did not look like a man who would let anything worry him to a great degree.

He was moderately built, his form being rounded out by bone and muscle in a way to excite admiration. There, however, ended all his just claims to beauty. Clad in a suit of rags, he presented an appearance almost comical.

His hair and beard were of a yellow-red color, the latter sparse and tangled, and the former long and coarse, and his complexion was of a ruddy, flame color.

Both Sigel and Barlow smiled at seeing this red-faced, red-haired recruit, and then

the former answered his unasked-for remark.

"So you think our chances desperate, my good man?"

"An ordinary man would never come out in the muss alive, but I know your timber, kernel, and reckon we won't see a shambler. Still I tell ye Jackson is goin' ter lick us to-morrer. Why? Because his force is so much bigger than ours that we can't get any show."

"And who are you, sir?"

"Sharpshot is my name, kurnel. Sometimes they call me Sharpshot, the scout, an' again the sharpshooter. It's all one to me."

"Sharpshot, the sharpshooter," laughed Barlow, "that's a bad name. Do you come from Sharpville, Sharpshooter?"

"Now you are laughin' at me, cap'n. Don't do it. I ain't ter blame fur my name."

"What are the numbers of the enemy?" Sigel asked, abruptly.

"I don't know, kurnel; but of you want ter find out, you had better do it 'arly to-morrer. Ben McCulloch an' Price will be around here before another sundown, an' then whar would we be?"

"We'll be dead, done, or alive!" said Barlow, with a reckless laugh.

They questioned the man who had claimed so odd a name somewhat further, but as he did not seem to possess any actual information, finally set him down as a creaker, and, walking away, left him to himself.

The night passed without further events of importance, but, on the following morning, the little army was early astir.

An advance was begun as soon as possible, and the devoted band moved on.

They advanced but fifteen hundred men, but their strength was greatly increased by two batteries of artillery, each containing four pieces.

Moving nearly northward, the Unionists were not long in sighting their opponents.

Barlow's command had fallen into line near Major Bischoff's cannon, for many of the men seemed attracted to the pieces; but, as mounted riflemen began to be seen in advance, they pushed ahead and acted as a skirmish line.

The horsemen before referred to did not seem inclined to do much fighting.

They skurried about in the dashing manner peculiar to mounted men, but all the while kept at a safe distance from the Union rifles.

"What are the critters drivin' at?" demanded one of the men.

"In my opinion, they are merely watching me," said Barlow. "You see they give ground as far as we advance, and, in this way, they will soon know just what our strength is."

"That don't seem right."

"It ain't right, an' I want to know why you allow it. Why don't you drop the miserable critters?"

Barlow turned to see Sharpshot.

"Aha! are you here?"

"I don't know why you should be in my command," said Major Bischoff sharply.

"Lord! I ain't here fur any harm. You see them critters can't be hit from hyar, do you?"

"Possibly they might if we were to halt for that purpose."

"Nonsense! Let me show you a point or two."

As he spoke, the sharpshooter threw up his long rifle and took aim for a moment.

Barlow noticed that the barrel did not touch the test, and admired his nerve, but he felt more pleased when, following the crack of the piece, one of the horsemen reeled in his saddle, and then went down helplessly.

"Told you so," said Sharpshot, with a chuckle. "Lord! it ain't much o' a trick ter throw lead. Try your hand, cap'n, will you?"

"I don't know, my good man. May be we will get some fellows in force by and by."

The mount reared while in motion, but, with his gaze fixed on the enemy, seemed deep in thought.

"Cap'n," he finally said, "o' you will take twenty men an' foller my lead, I'll show them fellers a trick they can't swaller without chokku'."

"What is the trick?"

"We are movin' uncommon slow, now; what is to hinder our runnin' around to their moun' an' layin' an' ambush for them?"

"Can it be done?"

"Why not?"

"I for one, don't know the country well enough."

"I do; I know every foot of it. What

say, cap'n, shall I lead your fellers ter victory?"

Sharpshot spoke eagerly, and for a moment Barlow remembered that he was a stranger, and doubted the wisdom of trusting him. Then, however, they reached the spot where lay the sharpshooter's victim, and that seemed to settle the question of his good faith.

"I will consult Colouel Sigel," said Barlow.

He did as he said, received the required permission, and then twenty of his men detached themselves from the others so cunningly that the Confederate scouts did not suspect them.

Sigel had the way, and they were soon on the left flank of the Union force.

Still, on they went. The ground was hilly and broken, and the guide led the way where they were for the most part screened by trees and high land.

Now and then they saw the horsemen off at the east, but their own movements seemed unwatched.

Going three rods to every one traveled by the army, they were soon well in advance, and Sharpshot had the third of eleven in another trap on the Confederates.

"We want a prisoner apiece, and that gives a hoss apiece," he added.

"Don't cook your game until it is caught," cautioned Barlow, who was not wholly at his ease.

"We're goin' ter have it," said the scout, confidently.

Just then, a cry arose from the men at the rear, and Barlow wheeled to see a starting animal.

From around the head of a hill, a body of cavalry had suddenly swept, all clad in Confederate gray, and armed to the teeth, and as they dashed straight toward the Union scouts, there was an ominous clanking of scabbers.

Barlow saw the danger and prepared to meet it. The enemy were two to their one, and when it came to close quarters cavalry had a vast superiority over foot soldiers.

The men were not deadly enemies, and must be dealt with accordingly, while the first blow always tells.

"Boys, it's do or die!" he said, quickly, and in the fashion familiar to them in Indian warfare. "All together—fire!"

It was not so elaborate an order as the stereotyped one of military form, but almost as one man the brave fellows aimed and fired.

Destruction followed the discharge, and men swayed blindly in their saddles, and then fell heavily to the ground.

Ten Confederates would ride no more, but they still outnumbered the Unionists, and had the advantage of being mounted.

Seeing that they were not checked in the least, Barlow was for a moment at fault. His force were armed with rifles which were without bayonets, and the enemy must be met at a disadvantage.

CHAPTER III. HARD FIGHTING.

It was a critical moment, for the Confederates were near at hand and coming at a gallop, their sabers glistening in the air, but Sharpshot did not seem to be long at fault.

He sprung to the head of the column and waved a long bowie-knife above his head.

"Here's a chance for fun!" he shouted. "Men! men! every galoot an' cutyour higness. Hurrah for Sigel an' the Union flag!"

His words and example thrilled the men, and they cheered in the face of the danger. Barlow awoke and became the stern warrior in a moment.

"Revolvers and bowies!" he shouted. "Empty every saddle you can before they close, and then use the steel. Every man for himself!"

There was no time to say more. Already the Confederates were but a few yards away, and their horses covered a great strip of ground at every leap.

Out came the smaller weapons of the Unionists. All their lives had been passed in desultory fighting with the Indians, and when the closing order from Barlow reached their ears they knew how to act.

There was a sudden crackling along their whole front as their revolvers began to play, but at that distance they were not men to miss their mark. They fired, and other Confederates went down from their saddles, and other wild-eyed horses went bounding away riderless.

Then came the shock of the assault, and

only those who have felt such a thing can understand it.

To a foot soldier, especially if he has no bayonet, a horse and rider loom up tremendously.

He sees the horse, his eyes wild and flashing, and dashin' up the earth in little, splitting jets, and above him towers the rider, saber in hand.

The picture is a startling one, we say, and so all the more glory to those loyal sons of Missouri for the way in which they met it.

Like bloodhounds they sprung forward to meet the charge. Their strong hands grasped the reins of the horses and stayed them in their course; and then came the tug of war.

The sabers of the cavalrymen flashed brighter than ever; they were swung aloft, and then down they came with a sweep meant for loyal heads.

Some of them found their victims. Two or three brave men sank to the ground terribly gashed, but the majority dodged the stroke, and then their revolvers began to crack again.

Look at Captain Barlow! His powerful hand has grasped the bridle-rein of a black horse.

The animal bounds furiously under his hold and almost lifts him from his feet. At the same moment the rider strikes Barlow ducks his head, and the saber whistles through the empty air.

Then, still holding the struggling horse with his left hand, he thrusts his revolver past the neck and above the shoulder of the animal.

Again the saber goes up, but it is too late. A little puff of smoke, a sharp crack, and that good dashes out over the gray coat of the trooper.

He throws up his hands, reels and falls from his saddle.

Look at Sharpshot.

He is fighting with his clubbed rifle. No rider seems able to reach him, but the rifle is always busy, and where it falls, it falls to hurt.

The scene is wild and impressive, but it is soon over. The contestants separate, as most of the troopers are left of the fray, and what are left of the troopers gallop away in headlong haste.

One half of their number stay on the field, dead or dying; the destruction has been great.

Far better have the Unionists fared, but they do not care to pursue their advantage. Five of their own number are down, and others have hard knocks to attract their attention.

Stained by smoke and blood they look at each other, silent thus far, but the irrepressible Sharpshot finds his tongue very soon.

"Hurrah!" he cried, tossing up his old cap. "Told you thar was fight in your critters, Cap'n Barlow. They've did it, an' they did it ag'in."

"We have lost five men," said Barlow, sadly.

"An' they hev lost four times five. It's the way o' war. But, cap'n, I reckon our critters work in the head. We can't lay no trap for them cavalry, fer we know we are on the hoof!"

"It looks to me as though we have run into a trap ourselves," said the captain, looking at his fallen men.

"Who got the wust on't? I reckon them critters won't care to tackle us ag'in."

"I am inclined to think that if we don't get back to our army before long, we will be attacked by a force we can't defy. Our gallop is all an' amryate. We will fall back and avoid lessin' more men."

They slowly reined their steps, waiting for Sigel and his braves to join them.

Sharpshot had grown strangely silent. Suddenly he awoke and went to Barlow's side.

"You speak about our runnin' inter a trap, cap'n. Do you s'pose thar was treachery anywhere?"

"What makes you ask?"

"Out o' all them critters, I say, mighty quiet an' sly, an' it seems odd how they troopers, so scattered a little before, could so quickly get together an' hit us as they did."

Barlow looked thoughtfully at the sharpshooter. He had a keen, intelligent face, and looked like one able to penetrate plots and plans.

Barlow remembered, too, his suspicious regard to the ambush in the pass, and one great question arose in his mind.

He had not made his answer when those of his own command who had remained

with the army, began to arrive, and the smaller detachment fell into line.

"What luck, cap'n?" asked Sam Stiles.

"We return minus five brave souls; let that be my answer," said Barlow, moodily.

They went on, driving the mounted Confederates before them.

The latter made no stand, and seemed content to watch.

On went Sigel's army.

Dry Fork Creek was reached and passed; but, three miles further on, Sharpshot, who had run well to the front, fell back in some haste.

He came to say that he had found the enemy, and that they were halted, and awaiting the Unionists on a rise of ground a little beyond.

Sigel stayed the advance of his army, and the scout, with others of his craft, were sent out to reconnoiter.

When they returned, it was to report that Jackson's force greatly outnumbered theirs, and that he was well provided with cavalry.

"How about artillery?" Sigel asked.

"I can answer that," said Sharpshot, quickly. "There's whar they are weak. They have only a few old pieces, and what they bev ain't o' much use. They are loaded with trace-chains, bits o' old iron an' the like."

"Then we will make our cannon do the work. Major Bischoff, get your guns into position and open upon them."

The order was executed promptly, and the deep boom of the guns sounded along the front.

The return fire was weak, and it was soon seen that Sharpshot had spoken truly in regard to the enemy's artillery.

"Who is this man?" Sigel asked of Barlow, as the sharpshooter flapped his arms, and began crowing, which would have put a farm-yard rooster to shame.

"I never saw him until he interrupted us at the camp last night, as you will remember, colonel."

"He seems well informed, and all he has thus far told me has been proven true. It almost seems like an empty form to send my own men to verify what he tells me, but it will not do to trust a stranger too far."

For three hours the work of the Union artillery went on.

Bischoff stood grimly at his post and dispatched shot after shot, some of which seemed effective, and, as at the start, the return was weak.

Sigel began to feel uneasy.

With his small force he dared not make an advance, but there seemed to be nothing to prevent the Confederates from doing so.

This fact, the sagacious colonel to believe, had the soldiers won for gaining a decided advantage, and scouts were sent out to reconnoiter carefully.

The result proved the correctness of his judgment. It was found that the Confederate cavalry, under Rains, was moving around both flanks of the Unionists, and pushing south.

As this would never do, with Sigel's baggage-train at Dry Fork Creek in danger, the order for retreat ran along the line, and the movement began, though all was in accordance with the rules and good order.

When the Confederates saw them go they promptly followed. Before, they had feared Bischoff's guns; but the retreat looked like a panic to them, and they prepared to scoop the little army into their net.

It was easier to wish than to do. Sigel was still the brave soldier, and in perfect order he led the fifteen hundred along the back track; and when the men led by Jackson pressed too sharply, the shots of the cannon were too pointed to be disregarded.

As they neared Dry Fork Creek, Sharpshot came to Sigel with an air of one who brought a discovery.

"We're comin' ter have a brush over yonder," he said.

"At the creek. Them troopers have got around to our rear, and are waiting at the bluffs. You know that place—the road is narre an' right through the bluffs. The Confederates know it, an' they are waitin' ter give us a try."

It was important news, and Sigel was not slow to benefit by it.

As they neared the creek, his guns were brought around to the front, facing the bluffs, and as they saw the gray troopers drawn up to receive them, the cannon were turned upon them.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Sharpshot; "that teches them. Oh, they are jewels, them boomin' habies!"

He referred to the cannon; and, indeed,

they were making it warm for the cavalry; but they showed a given purpose to hold their post and guard the road.

CHAPTER IV. A STARTLING DISCOVERY

Colonel Sigel's quick eyes saw that one more thing was needed. He turned, and gave a few quick, but calm orders. The result was soon seen.

Near the first bluff of the creek gathered a body of his infantry, with Captain Barlow and his men among them. This had been at the captain's own request.

All was ready along the line. The Unionists stood in position, their weapons firmly grasped, and a determined gleam in their eyes. Then the word came.

With a grand sweep they dashed forward, breaking from cover and along the road. The Confederate cavalry saw what was coming, but they had no way of averting the blow. None of their own wretched cannon were near, while, as the Unionists dashed down the slope and across the bed of the creek, each horse sent shot after shot over their heads.

The southern bluff was reached by the eager boys in blue, and the boys without blue, who had loyal hearts. Then up they went impetuously.

Before that sight the cavalry wavered, Bischoff was still playing on their precious band, and the infantry bade fair to sweep them from existence.

The hurricane struck. The Confederates were brave, and they tried to hold the pass, but the dash of the Unionists was resistless. The young who had struck back feebly and turned and fled, leaving some of their men dead on the disputed ground.

Then the army proper and the guns came over quickly, and their faces were turned toward Carthage.

Sigel could no longer doubt that he was menaced by a foe too strong to be fought with a reasonable chance of success. His scouts agreed that Jackson had three men or more to every Unionist, and to face this army, liable, even probable as they were, to soon be reinforced by Price and McCulloch, would be madness.

Accordingly, the Confederates hanging on their rear and flanks, and with numerous skirmishes to enliven the occasion, the loyal troops went on in an orderly manner as far as Carthage.

There, Sigel had hoped to rest, but rest was fraught with danger, so away they went to Sarcoxie, and before that place was reached the pursuit was abandoned.

On the whole, the expedition had been successful. The Union troops had been defeated. The Union troops had been beaten back, but with such a loss of their superior in numbers, and, while they lost but thirteen men killed, the Confederates admitted over three times that number on the list, besides a large number wounded.

It was not until Sarcoxie was reached that Barlow remembered the papers he had taken from the pocket of the dead officer in the pass. From the time he left the place of ambush, he had been very busy, and, not thinking at any time that they would be of interest, the fact that he held the documents had slipped his mind.

At the latter town, however, he sat down to read them in the presence of several of his men.

Five letters were first, all without interest, and then came two or three official orders, also of no value; but last came a soiled paper which Barlow read with a variety of emotions. First, he was amazed, then doubtful, and, lastly, filled with consternation.

This was what he read in the coarse, bold and scholarly handwriting on the paper:

"N. B.—W.H. probably march on P. M. of to-day, and will be at Carthage or early number. The route is by way of the pass. A hundred men among those steep rocks can kill every soul, and strike an important blow."

EDGAR PETERSON."

It was a document which told a good deal. Coupled with the fact that Barlow's men had marched on the afternoon of the fourth, eighty in number and, by way of the pass, and that they had been ambushed by men among the rocks, it left no doubt but that the letter referred to them.

So far, all was clear, and so, too, was the fact that some one had betrayed their plans to the Confederates and sought their destruction.

The plot had only failed because the gallant band showed themselves men of uncommon mettle.

But who had betrayed them? It seemed a useless question, for at the end of the letter

was a name plainly written. It might have been an assumed one, but it was not.

Captain Barlow knew "Edgar Peterson" well enough to know the fact which sent the blood from his face to give place to a look of unutterable horror.

One moment he hesitated, and then a sudden impulse assailed him.

"I will hide it!"

Even as the thought entered his mind, a voice spoke quickly at the captain's elbow.

"Ala! so that is the name of the traitor!" Barlow wheeled around like a tiger to see Sam Stiles and another man. They had read over his shoulder.

"Dogs!" he cried, furiously, "how dare you play the spy on my actions?"

The men stood dumfounded. They were old neighbors of the captain, and his remarkable outburst almost stunned them. Other men drew near, and Stiles apologetically replied:

"We meant no harm, cap'n."

"Then why were you reading private papers? I am tempted to—"

Barlow realized that he was making a serious mistake, and paused abruptly.

"I am sorry if I did wrong," said Stiles, meekly.

"What did you say about finding out the traitor? Does that paper explain anything?" asked another man, who had not forgotten how Barlow put them away for future inspection.

"Yes, if does!" cried Stiles' companion. "It is the letter writ by the man who betrayed us, and caused the death of our brave fellers in the pass. His name is at the bottom, and that name is Ed Peterson!"

There was a murmur of admiration, hotly, and a murmur of high character ran along the line. All there knew Ed Peterson, and, for reasons of their own, they accepted the truth of what Johnson had told them.

"It may be a forgery," cried Max Barlow, like a man catching at a straw.

"It is in Ed's writing; I'll swear to that."

"He would not be so base."

"And why not? Ain't he the biggest drunkard in Jasper county? Ain't he a miserable, shiftless vagabond?"

"He may have been that, though he has promised to reform now; but he would never become murderer of his own friends and neighbors."

Barlow spoke with warmth, but Sam Stiles took up the other side with a gloomy shake of his head.

"I don't blame you for wantin' it otherwise; but look at the evidence. Ed knew all our plans, an' this letter tells them in his own writin'."

"Yes; and why did he refuse to come with us?" cried still another man. "He professed loyalty to the Union, and swore never to touch another drop of liquor; but he wan't at all rabid to march out and face the danger."

"He always was a sneak."

"And now he's a traitor and murderer."

"A drunkard can't be trusted, anyhow." These and similar cries arose about poor Barlow, who had strong reasons for wishing different things of Edgar Peterson; but, though his men seemed on the eve of mutiny, and their looks were dark, he faced them calmly.

"Friends and fellow soldiers," he said, "I beseech you to slow in condemning him utterly. I acknowledge that his past life has been full of mistakes, but a fortnight ago he turned from paths of evil to paths of virtue. I believe he will keep that now. I honestly think, too, that his heart is all for the Union. Men, I have been of good courage late, for I thought he was sure to reform. I am so sure of it now, that I ask you to suspend your judgment until we investigate."

The majority of the men were affected by this appeal. Their anger had arisen hot and blindly against Edgar Peterson, as the betrayer of their brave friend; but a fortnight ago he had turned from paths of evil to paths of virtue, while the fact that during all the time his influence was wretched to his will; many of the men went quietly back to their places, but there were those who grumbled, and still thought the fatal letter a wall of evidence which nothing could demolish.

And who was Edgar Peterson?

A resident of their own township, and a man of about Barlow's own age; a man brave in his way, and as good a shot as could easily be found in Missouri. In their former boyhood, they had often done good service, while the fact that during all the time his influence was wretched to his will; many of the men went quietly back to their places, but there were those who grumbled, and still thought the fatal letter a wall of evidence which nothing could demolish.

This brother, however, had died in 1860.

Edgar with all his gifts of nature, had one failing which had made him despised by many, and pitied by those who would have been his friends.

He had fallen into the habit of reckless drinking when a mere boy, and during the last seven years his life had been one terrible to contemplate. Strong liquor was his master, and, as is always the case, it was a merciless one. Poor Edgar went down hill rapidly. Going from bad to worse, he lost all control over himself, and thought of nothing except to pour the demoralizing fluid down his throat.

True, he had periods of struggling against his master, but they always ended in the same way.

Even the women and children came to look with indifference at the sight of Ed Peterson staggering through the streets, or lying, completely intoxicated, wherever he chanced to fall.

What could be spoken of as "Poor Ed!"

Of late there had been a change, and Barlow hoped it would last. He had hoped it with all the earnestness of his nature.

Near the village lived two sisters whose names were Olive and Lena Somers. Barlow had long been on terms of intimacy with them, and for a year Olive had been his betrothed.

Of late, Edgar Peterson had been much to the house.

People saw it, and wondered that these two girls, against whom not a whisper of reproach had ever been raised, should thus welcome the drunkard of the town.

Blind as people usually are, even when they think they know all, they did not suspect that Lena had turned her attention to saving Edgar; they did not suspect that he had sworn to abandon drinking, or that between him and Lena had sprung up an intimacy which was worship on his part, and—well, we will see how it was with her.

CHAPTER V. THE MOB.

The small but beautiful house of Abram Somers looked peaceful and inviting enough to attract any one, as it nestled near the road with a field and wood at the rear; and the picture was made doubly inviting as father and Lena were about to perform the last duties of the evening.

Supper had been eaten, Abram and his elder daughter had gone to the village, and Lena was left alone for the time.

We have said that she was fair-faced. Descriptions are dull reading, but let us pause to say that this girl with her small form, golden hair, blue eyes, and sweet but intelligent face made a rare picture of innocence.

People who knew her always had good words for the younger daughter of Abram Somers.

They knew her to be pure, tender-hearted, earnest and self-sacrificing at all times. This they knew, but even those who had watched her grow from childhood, did not suspect the depth, strength and devotion of her woman's heart.

A step sounded at the door as she was putting the finishing touch to her work, and started quickly.

"There a knock arose to her face.

"Edgar!" she said, softly.

"Yes, Lena, it is I."

And then the man who had entered, moved forward a step and took the hand she extended to him.

Was indeed Edgar Peterson, the man about whom the interest of our story now centers.

He did not look like a man of depravity. Young, gaunt and mere with a fine face and figure, he would have been called commanding by any one, though there were some traces of dissipation still visible on his countenance. "Yes, it is I," he added, smiling. "I've come back to you in my right mind, and I can say more: Not a drop of liquor have I touched since I went away. Lena, those dark days are past. Your love has drawn me back from the awful gulf where I trod so long, and by the help of Heaven, I will henceforth be a man!"

He raised one hand aloft and his face was full of a resolution and glory which went straight to her heart.

"I am so glad, Edgar!"

Simple words, but as she crept to his arms there was a peace and happiness between them which passes description.

They sat down together on the old lounge, and their words soon became more practical.

"Have you heard the news from the front?" he asked.

"They tell me Sigel fought the enemy bravely, and then drew back his army through a force many times his own number."

"So he did, all honor to him and his brave men. Lena, you should have seen our colonel. Brave Sigel! he is a king among men and I felt like kneeling at his feet."

"You were there, Edgar?"

"So I was, though I betrayed the fact thoughtlessly. Yes, I was with the army, fighting as best I could."

"With Max Barlow's men?"

"No. I wished to hold to my resolution to change my name before I asked to fight among my neighbors, and not, a sight did they gain of the drunkard—"

"Edgar?"

"Pardon me, Lena, the word slipped out unconsciously. No, they did not see me, but I was there."

"Where is the army now?"

"At Springfield. We retreated through Cartwright, Sarcoxie and Mount Vernon to Springfield. There Sigel hopes to soon be joined by General Lyon, and the united bodies will oppose Price, McCulloch and Jackson."

"There will be hard fighting," sighed Lena.

"So there will; but, at all costs, the Union must be preserved."

An hour passed, and still the two sat in conversation.

Despite the dark war-clouds, Lena was very happy.

People looked so noble and manly since he had thrown off the millstone of intemperance from his neck that sunshine seemed all around and about her.

She was risking much in trusting him so fully, for his reformation was but just begun, but she had all of a woman's confidence in the man she loved.

In the midst of their conversation came a sharp knocking at the door.

They started from their lovers' position, but neither had thought of trouble, and Lena turned toward the entrance with a countenance which did not avail all too soon.

She opened the door.

Before her were a score of men, all armed, and with a fierceness in their manner which startled her, though she recognized them as people of the village, and Sam Stiles was at their head.

"Good-evening," said the latter, abruptly.

"Is Ed Peterson hyar?"

The question came so quickly and sharply that Lena changed color in perceptible uneasiness, but Edgar pushed forward before she could answer.

"Yes, Sam, I am here," he said, quietly.

"Glad on't, for we are arter you," said Stiles, sourly.

"After me? And what is wanted?"

The speaker saw that every face bore a scowl, but in those days of warfare that was not strange.

He did not for a moment suspect that anything was wrong.

Stiles shifted his gaze away so that he would not meet Lena's close regard.

He saw that she was frightened, and had enough manhood to respect her feelings, and he was going to have a war-meeting, an' we want everybody there. Max Barlow said he reckoned you was hyar, so we come to ask you ter go with us."

Stiles was lying, but he did it like one accustomed to the business.

"Of course I will go. Wait until I get my rifle and I am with you."

Edgar stepped back into the house, and then Lena caught his arm.

"Aye, Edgar!" she said, nervously, "I fear—I fear—"

"What?" he asked, in surprise.

"I fear those men mean you harm. Did you see how they scowled at you? Sam Stiles was never your friend, and I fear he has not told the truth now."

"Indeed Lena, you are mistaken. Their scowls are only shadows of the war, and though Sam and I have never been friends, this is the first all little troubles of the past. Besides, he is one of Barlow's men."

"Still, I wish you would not go. I shall not feel easy, for I cannot rid myself of the impression that they mean you harm. Remain here, Edgar, and only go to their meeting when you have Max Barlow to assist you."

It was a woman's appeal, based on a woman's fears, but Edgar only kissed her trembling lips.

Surely, his old friends and neighbors could mean him no harm.

He and they had joined hands to aid in

preserving the Union, and now they were as brothers.

All this he explained, holding her hand, and when she saw how anxious he was to lead her in good spirits, she managed to smile faintly.

He said good-bye and they parted.

He had said that he would see her again that evening, but the future was concealed from their vision.

The men were impatiently awaiting him.

He joined them, rifle in hand, and away went the whole body toward the village.

Stiles used to talk about the recent fighting, but somehow he was far from it, and his remarks were ill-connected.

He glanced querulously at his companions, and they, in return, scowled the more, and kept close to him and Edgar Peterson.

Passing around to the rear of the house, they entered the wood before mentioned and hurried in the direction of the village, but half way through the wood, the glances among the men became more frequent.

Stiles said, "Sam, come along with me."

He had uttered a plaintive sigh, and at the word one of the men behind Peterson suddenly snatched his rifle from his grasp, while, a second later, two others seized him by the arms, and he stood a prisoner.

Disarmed and in the trap, he stood quietly, but looked at them in utter amazement.

"What does this mean?" he asked.

"So you don't know?" snorted Stiles, his manner not once changing. "So you are as simple as a baby! Oh, no; you can't guess what it means, can you? You ain't done nothin' wrong, hoye yo? You are an angel in disguise, ain't ye?"

The man poured out his bitter sarcasm with a venom which dumfounded Edgar, but he still stood quietly and proved his nerve by remarkable calmness.

"I am wholly at fault. If this is a joke, count me in to carry on it; I don't like to spoil your men's pleasure. But, boys, if you are thinking me a criminal, any kind, I am without a clew to my crime."

"How about the men who fell in the pass?"

"I have heard of that tragedy, but I was not there."

"Of course you wan't! Of course you wouldn't risk your own precious neck! But, Ed Peterson, you were not so careful of the men who had been your neighbors."

"I am not in the dark—"

"Come into the light; come into a blaze that shall show you up as you are. Read that, willyou?"

The prisoner's hands were still held tightly, but Stiles thrust an open paper before his eyes, and he could read easily enough. He did read, and the words almost paralyzed him.

The note was the one read by Max Barlow to the men at Sarcoxie; the one purporting to be from Edgar Peterson, to some one who had afterward laid the ambush for the Unionists, acting on the information contained in the note.

Edgar read; and, as he finished, a look of horror was on his face; but it quickly gave place to indignation.

"What base forgery is this?" he demanded. "What dare to sign my name to such an infamous letter?"

"I am not in writing."

"Still, it is forgery. Sam Stiles. Abe Taylor—what do you know of the matter? Are you joking on?"

"That letter, Ed, was found on the body of the man who commanded the ambushers at the pass," said Abe Taylor, gravely.

Then the whole business flashed upon Peterson. The Barlow squad had been ambushed by means of information contained in that note, and not only was it signed by his name, but it was in a handwriting so like his own that it might have gone safely through a court of law.

All this he saw, and plain it was; too, that deadly passions and danger for him had sprung from the base but cunning forgery.

"Men," he cried, in a clear voice, "I do not wonder that you look at me darkly, but I swear by all I hold sacred that I never saw that paper until to-night."

CHAPTER VI.

KEELER'S BAND.

A hoarse murmur arose from the crowd, and then excited exclamations followed which were none too choice in their wording.

"But how do you explain it?" asked Abe Taylor, who seemed to be the coolest man there.

"Simply by saying that it was a forgery. My hand never penned those words, nor do I know their author. I swear it. How it was done, I cannot guess, but I do see in this that I have an enemy somewhere, who purposely imitated my writing and signed my name to that infamous paper. But, friends, be ever so steeped in the cause, you must know that the wording of the note is somewhat vague, while the identity of the man addressed is concealed under a mask. Who is 'A. B.'? I, for one, cannot imagine. But, friends, amid all this vagueness, one name stands out plain and clear—my own."

"What of that?" snapped Stiles.

"Simply this: The forger there gives himself away. If there had been no trick in the matter, the name would be hidden like the remainder of the note; it would be vague like the name of the man he dressed. There, I say, the forger betrays his secret. My name was written, so distinctly, simply for the purpose of running me."

He had made a strong argument, and, coupled with his bold and persuasive address, it touched some of the men; but Stiles broke down the barrier by an unbelieving retort, and again the murmur swelled among the men.

"You can't lie out of it; your own writing betrays you," said Stiles, savagely. "Boys, what is the verdict?"

"Kill the traitor!"

"Hang him!"

These shouts arose fiercely, but half the men did not join in the hue and cry.

They were all of Barlow's command; they intended to do what was right, and though Peterson's past was against him, and the evidence in the present case terribly strong, Abe Taylor was about to raise his voice in favor of delay and an investigation.

He was too late, however.

At the last words from the more rabid of the crowd, they rushed upon the prisoner, and a rope was cast over his neck.

Murder stained in their faces, and their aspect was terrible.

Edgar saw his peril, and was not disposed to meet it tamely.

He flung out his strong arms and two of his foes went down.

His eyes were full of battle-fire, and, with anything like a chance, he would have cleared a way through them.

Unluckily, however, the rope was about his neck, and when a sudden jerk cast him to the ground, his enemies leaped upon him like a pack of unhandled panthers.

After that, the end was soon reached. Despite his struggles, he was soon subdued, and with his hands bound behind his back, and the rope around his neck, he was dragged under a spreading tree.

Abe Taylor tried to interfere, but they pushed him back, and the loose end of the rope was cast over the lower branch of the tree.

Edgar had ceased to struggle. He believed that his end was near, but not a sign of cruelty was visible.

Prond and erect as though on a conqueror's throne, he stood among his destroyers, and looked them calmly in the face.

He could die, if need be, but not as a coward.

One moment, as he thought of Lena, his gaze wavered, but the emotion was soon past.

"Up with him!"

The command came from Sam Stiles, and as he spoke, the men at the rope obeyed. They pulled sharply, Edgar was lifted clear of the ground, and, in his hand dangling and struggling, a terrible sight, in mid-air.

"Tie the rope to yonder sapling!"

Stiles spoke without a trace of feeling, and the order was obeyed.

Then all stepped back to view the awful scene before them—the lawless hurrying of a human soul before its Maker.

Brief was the view given them.

There was a crashing in the bushes, a shout of command, and as they turned to see the cause, a band of horsemen in Confederate gray swept into sight, their naked sabers dashed as the last beams of the descending sun fell on the polished blades.

"Guerrillas!"

"Keeler's band!"

"The Jasper Centaurs!"

Such were the exclamations that fell from the dismayed Unionists—dismayed, for they were outnumbered, and they knew the way of Keeler's band all too well.

A detachment of irregular soldiers—pioneers would be a better word—formed from the lowest of the men of their own and surrounding towns, and led by one Keeler, of

the vicinity, they had for some time been scouring the country, with saber and torch as their tools of trade.

Wearing Confederate gray, and professing to be fighting for the Southern cause, they had used no discrimination in their work, but had robbed and outraged with utter disregard of political inclinations.

Seeing this banded crew, the Unionists stood not upon the manner of their going, but took to headlong flight.

Through the bushes went each and every man, fleeing for dear life, and in their rear chased the guerrillas.

Under the swaying figure of poor Peterson went Keeler's band, giving heed only to the fugitives, and the pursuit became warm.

The Unionists aimed to reach the village, and to return to prevent them, but in the bushes the foragers had the advantage over the horses, and they finally broke from cover with a hundred yards advantage.

Before them lay a level field, and, beyond that, the village; and when the Jasper Centaurs broke from the trees a race for life began.

The fugitives ran as they had never run before, and at the very front sped Sam Stiles, a look of terror in his face. Close behind them sped the guerrillas, yelling like Indians, and swinging their sabers.

Before them lay a level field, and of their horses, the best went spinning into the air in spiteful jets, and every minute saw the intervening space decreased.

Luckily, the field was not wide enough to ruin all, and as the village houses seemed to stretch out their welcoming arms, the fugitives cleared the open space, and darted here and there among the houses, where they once more had the advantage.

But now a new danger menaced the town. Keeler's band was in the saddle, and up to that day no checks had ever been dealt them, when they were on their raids. Now, they were going straight for the heart of the town, and that meant the old story of the saber and torch.

Faster than the stride of their horses, had gone the tidings of their coming. Max Barlow, home for a little while with his men, to make final arrangements there before formally joining Sigel's army, heard the news and rushed out with the others to see and do, if anything could be done.

Confusion reigned everywhere; for all dreaded the iron hand of the Jasper Centaurs, but Max Barlow's courage arose equal to the occasion.

He shouted to his men, and they fell into line.

"Stand firm, all!" he said. "Remember we fight for our homes and women, and for precious lives. Let us give Keeler a lesson he will not soon forget."

A cheer arose from his followers, and the bravest of the women waved their handkerchiefs.

Max acted quickly but systematically. Among the others, were a score of old men and boys whose hearts were stouter than those of the women.

These he directed to take cover behind the houses; and, at the proper moment, to pour in their shots thick and fast.

With his own immediate command he intended to fight in a different way. If the guerrillas were allowed to enter the town, more or less destruction must follow. They must be stayed at the first, if possible.

Acting on this idea, Barlow hurried his men to the eastern side of the village. Coming at full speed, they saw the Jasper Centaurs close at hand.

Barlow gave a few rapid orders and the reception committee was ready.

On came the horsemen with wild yells, and their horses' feet soon rang on the hard soil of the street.

They saw the Unionists, but they saw, too, that the force was inferior in point of numbers to their own, and they yelled again as they imagined how they would sweep them away.

Barlow glanced at his men. They were standing like rocks; no fear that they would fail him.

"Fire!"

His command rang out clearly, and like an echo came the flash and report of the Union weapons.

It was a destructive volley for the guerrillas. Many a yelling rider found his breath cut short by death, and many a horse galloped on without a master as the leaden hail sped on its way.

Despite this, the advance was not stayed. Still dashed the Centaurs toward their foes, their sabers raised on high, and it looked as though they would yet win the day.

Barlow thought differently. Since his march with Sigel, he had succeeded in getting good muskets for all his men, and each one was provided with a bayonet.

Thus it was that the guerrillas, in the midst of their expected triumph, saw the line of Unionists stand on their knee and present a long array of glittering steel; while at the same moment, the invalid corps, as the boys and old men may be called, began to blaze away on each flank.

To ride a horse against an unarmed foe is one thing, but to urge him against a bayonet is a decidedly different matter; and, as the Centaurs saw this bold front, they hesitated perceptibly.

Keeler, however, was a man not easily frightened, nor was he inclined to estimate the prowess of the defenders very highly. His clear voice arose above all other sounds:

"On, Centaurs, on! Look your enemy in the eyes, and hit them hard. Strike for the Confederacy!"

His words revived the ebbing courage of the guerrillas; they pressed on, crossed the intervening space and met the bayonets.

As short a time as they had been in the field, Keeler had taught them many a trick of war; and, when their horses' breath seemed about to be pierced, they bent forward to turn the bayonets aside with their sabers.

In many cases they succeeded, but in others it was quite the reverse, and the war steps began to bound and scream loudly as they were cut through skin and flesh.

Then all was confusion. The Union line became broken, and sabers began to ring against rifle barrels and opposing blades; men grappled hand to hand; shouts and curses broke out in every key; and above all sounded that most terrible sound of battle—the scream of wounded horses.

CHAPTER VII.

BARLOW'S ADVENTURE.

Max Barlow was fighting like a tiger. He had dear ones to battle for—a mother and sister in the village, as many others had, and the men looked to him for example. He knew this, and wielded his sword with great skill and execution.

As he fought, he saw that his followers were holding the guerrillas in check.

He saw many gray-uniformed men were on the ground, lying side by side with dead horses; and the Unionists fought with grim determination, which was encouraging to their leader.

Wherever the guerrillas galloped, a band, already red with Confederate blood, seemed sure to appear, and their advantage of being mounted did not avail them much.

Barlow tried in vain to reach Keeler. A swordsman of great ability, he would gladly have crossed blades with the rival chief; but it was not so to be. Either through design or through Keeler's lack of control.

For some time the fight went on, but the leader of the Centaurs clearly perceived that his band was being roughly handled. Too many were falling to make amends for possible plunder, and he resolved to withdraw while he could, and come again when the village was not so well defended.

One thing he aspired to do, however, before he went. If he could capture the Union captain it would be a creditable exploit, and would in a degree make amends for the general defeat.

He called to two of his men, and the three presented themselves together upon Barlow.

The latter was glad to see Keeler, and tried to get at him, but one of the men caught his sword-arm and clung like a mastiff.

Another moment and Max was lifted clear off the ground and laid across Keeler's horse, just in front of the rider. With such odds, struggles availed nothing, and a cord was wound around his bands.

"Be quiet, now, or I will shoot!" Keeler sharply said. Then, raising his voice, he shouted a brief command to his men.

They heard it with joy, and obeyed promptly.

It was an order for retreat; and at the word the Jasper Centaurs shook off their foes, wheeled and dashed away from the scene of strife, followed by a few stray bullets.

The villagers had won the battle; the guerrillas had received a disastrous check, and, as they fled in haste, the Union cheers caused them to curse in concert—but Max Barlow was a prisoner!

He lay across the back of Keeler's horse in an uncomfortable position, his feet hanging

on one side and his head the other. This fact, however, gave him an idea.

He looked keenly about, and, seeing that all was favorable if the first step could be taken, proceeded to try the cords on his hands.

They had been hastily applied, and he had cunningly held his wrists a little apart when being bound. Now, he found by experimenting, they were in a condition to be easily taken.

His scheme of escape was a desperate one; but he had no desire to become a captive of the band, and if he moved at all it must be promptly.

He twisted his hands about stealthily, and the cords fell off.

So far all was well.

Then, without stirring his body, he reached down and laid hold of the saddle-girth. He wished to unbuckle it, but it had been drawn so tightly that he almost abandoned hope, as he could not encircle the taut strap.

"It's do or die; I must unbuckle it!" he muttered.

So he put forth all of his strength, tightened the girth still more, loosened the buckle and slowly drew it through the longer end of the strap.

Thus far, all was well.

Keeler sat on a saddle which could easily be thrown off, and Max had his hands to himself.

They were well at the front, too, for the guerrilla chief rode a horse remarkable for his speed; even then he was riding him in to avoid distancing his followers—and all seemed ripe for the venture.

Suddenly the passive mood of the prisoner vanished. He came up from his dangling position with surprising agility, and, as the surprised guerrilla raised his hand to strike him, he received a push which swept him to one side.

Never suspecting that the girth had been tampered with, Keeler tried only to hang fast to the saddle.

In this attempt he succeeded only too well for his own good.

It was to his saddle, but the saddle did not hang to the horse. Instead, it went off as though greased, and, accompanied by Keeler, fell crashing to the ground.

Barlow barely saved himself from the same fate. He caught at the horse's mane, however, and, being a good rider, succeeded in holding fast. Then he grasped the bridle-rein and was safe in position.

This little event had excited the horse into a mad gallop; and, looking back, as he shot rapidly away, Max saw the dismounted guerrilla just regaining his feet and pouring out a torrent of curses and orders to the men.

Max shouted triumphantly, waved one hand in farewell to the men who had had no bullets to avenge him, and then the intervening space rapidly widened.

The Unionist had heard much about the speed of Keeler's horse, but never before had he thought that it would ever be used to his benefit; and he felt a natural triumph, mixed with joy, at his own escape, as he left the guerrillas behind.

Pursuit was made, as a matter of course, but it was like chasing the wind, and in the rapidly gathering shades of night, the horse's riders were soon lost to each other's sight.

Barlow dared not turn back to the village at once, but he bore around to the right gradually, took advantage of a wood, and was soon going in the direction of the village.

Somewhat later, he saw the guerrillas pass on his right hand, but they were too distant to be clearly seen; and when they were gone he resumed his way.

His course carried him to the very wood where Keeler's band had first struck the Unionists—the lynching party—and as he was riding past, he was surprised to see Abe Taylor and Dave Harney come out and stand in his path.

"How do, cap'n," said the latter, in a manner which showed that he knew nothing of Barlow's brief captivity. "Is all quiet at the village?"

"I guess so; why not? What are doing here, Dave?"

Harney wiped his forehead with his sleeve in a nervous manner.

"Ain't you heered what happened byar to-night?" he asked, in a manner equally nervous.

"No. What do you mean?"

"Abe—you tell."

"No," said Taylor, curtly. "I ain't a coward, an' I'll face the music; but you agreed to tell the story."

Dave told the captain all that had transpired.

"What can we do?" Dave asked.

"Search!" was the terse reply. "Abe Taylor, if you had the honor of being one of the lynchers, go over the ground again and look for a clew."

It was done, but nothing came of it. Edgar Peterson, dead or alive, had disappeared completely, as though buried in the earth; the lynchers' rope was also beyond their sight.

Abe had made a full explanation of the tragic affair, and Barlow decided that it must be the guerrillas had returned and cut down the victim—or it might be some stranger, unseen by Taylor, had done the work at the time of the first charge.

The possibility that Edgar might be alive and at the Somers' cottage, caused Barlow to go there on a feigned errand. He saw Sam Oliver and Lena Somers, when he inquired for Edgar. Lena told how he had gone to the village with the other men.

She was calm in her mein, and, satisfied that she knew nothing of the tragedy, he rejoined Harney and Taylor, and the three went to the village, Barlow retaining the captured horse.

His anger against Sam Stiles was at white heat, and he at once sought for that person. In vain, however, for Stiles had disappeared into the shadows.

The captain devoted all his attention to caring for those wounded in the fight with the Jasper Centaurs, but his mind was always on the lynchers' victim. He felt so sure that he had been on the road to reformation and honor that it seemed a terrible thing for him to be thus cut off at the beginning of his brighter career.

CHAPTER VIII.

"THE PATHFINDER."

Barlow expected to solve the mystery of Edgar's disappearance on the following morning, but in this he was disappointed. Edgar did not appear, and all attempts to solve the mystery of the gallows-tree were futile.

The ground in the vicinity was plowed up by the hoofs of Keeler's cavalry, and even Dave Harding, who was a skillful trailer, failed to find anything bearing on a solution of the mystery.

The captain was very much perplexed. The great question in his mind was whether Peterson was dead or alive. If the latter, he seemed to have fled from the neighborhood; if the former, what had become of his body?

Mature reflection convinced Barlow that they had not been cut down by the guerrillas; if they had done the work, it was not likely they would have carried off the robes. Some other victim, consequently, he surmised; he might even then be riding with Keeler's band, but there was no proof in support of the theory, and Max did not for a moment believe in it.

The news of the hanging went abroad, and reached the ears of Lena Somers and her friends. The former wept bitterly, and he sought Barlow to solve the mystery, but he could not gain any clew.

Days went on, and the mystery remained as dark as ever. Peterson was seen no more in the town, and people came to speak of him as one dead.

Barlow saw that Lena was grieving deeply. She seemed to have forgotten how to smile; and the captain longed to get his hands on the man who had started the lynchers.

Sam Stiles, however, was seen no more about the place.

For the weeks that followed, Barlow led his men on many dashes against the Confederates. At times he lost men, but the vacancies were quickly filled, and the band was making for itself a name throughout all Missouri.

Somehow, he could never encounter Keeler's guerrillas, much as he desired it. That active chief was like a will-o'-the-wisp; and, despite his superiority of numbers, he seemed reluctant to meet the man who was riding his horse all alone in the Ozark district.

It was during one of these dashes, on a hint from his superiors, Keeler had learned to discriminate between friend and foe, and he was more of a soldier and less of a common rascal than when he first took to the saddle.

Still, he was wild and lawless in his way, and, between his force and others of the same kind, Missouri was sadly scourged by irregular bands.

Many of these were without uniforms, and, dressed in home-made, butternut-colored suits, and armed in every conceivable fash-

ion—they made anything but dashing looking defenders of a growing cause.

Toward the last of July, occurred two events which produced a material change in Barlow's plans. The first came when the band, acting in concert with another, was attacked by a superior force of Confederates and nearly annihilated; and the second may be learned from a conversation between Barlow and Dave Harney the following morning.

"How many men are fit for duty, Dave?" "About twenty, cap'n."

"Ah! that was a fatal fight. I warned the major, but he would have his own way. Now our band is cut all in pieces."

"They died nobly, but they are lost to the Union."

"And, cap'n—"

"What?"

"The rest say they are sick of irregular war. They want to jine the army, an' they are lookin' toward General Lyon with greedy eyes."

"Let them go; I am glad of it. Dave, I, too, am sick of this life. Relying on ourselves for resources, we have to plunder too much to suit me. To-day I will disband the troups, and then I am off for St. Louis."

"What for?" Dave asked, in amazement.

"To offer myself to General Fremont. You know I told you yesterday that he had been appointed to the command of the Western Department. Dave, I had rather serve under that man than any other in this country. He is a hero, if one ever lived. Remember how he led that gallant band of adventurers through the ice and snow of the Rocky Mountains. They suffered fearfully, but the pathfinder's brave heart never quailed."

"He's a man o' a kind I like. None o' your carpet soldiers fur me. John C. Fremont has been a man among men, an' when he gets soldiers an' wepons he will cut his bigness right through Missouri. But, Lord bless you, he ain't got the material now. He lacks men and guns, big an' little, an' I reckon he won't find money plenty ter pay his volunteers."

"He will be crippled until he gets them; but the time is comin' when I can give 'em my forces with him, if he will have 'em."

So that day Max Barlow bade farewell to his band, made a last visit to Olive and Lena Somers and started for St. Louis, where he arrived on the last day of July.

John C. Fremont, who had won such deserved honor in the West by crossing the Rocky Mountains with a band of gallant explorers—an exploit which will live in the history of our country as long as the republic endures—was selected among men—had been placed in charge of the department in which Missouri was contained, with his headquarters at St. Louis.

His work began under discouraging circumstances.

The three-months men were leaving the service, and money was lacking to pay new recruits.

His cannon were to be sent from Washington—but they went to the Army of the Potomac—and the brave Pathfinder was deserted on all sides by trouble and embarrassment.

Such was the condition of affairs when Max Barlow arrived in St. Louis.

By chance he had a view of the Pathfinder sooner than he had expected.

Standing in the street, he saw the brave explorer ride past, accompanied by Adjutant-General Harding and others, and Max lifted his voice to join with those who cheered the rider.

"It's a proper good sight, ain't it?" said a voice at his elbow.

Barlow wheeled, and then put out his hand as he saw the well-remembered face of Sharpshot, the scout.

"You here?" he exclaimed.

"I should remark that I am. I'm most always 'round somewhar," said the sharpshooter.

"I have not seen you since Sigel's battle."

"That's because you ain't been in the right place, I s'pose. I didn't know it that time. Ah, Kurnel Harding or General Lyon—or Fremont, fur that matter."

"Do you know General Fremont?"

"I am his scout!"

The red-haired sharpshooter drew himself up to his full height, and looked as proud as the peaks of the Ozark.

"I am going to offer my services to him."

"Be you?" said Sharpshot, eagerly. "Good fur you; go right in an' win. That ain't another man in Missouri like him. When I say this I allow Gifford Lyon ter be as brave a

man as lives, but Fremont is my favorite over all."

"And mine. Man, I love that gallant explorer. Think of his hardships and bravery in the extreme West, and think what he has done for his country. All honor to him, I say!"

Barlow spoke with enthusiasm, and Sharpshut flung his battered cap into the air.

Different as the two were in looks and character, they were united in their admiration for the Pathfinder.

The day was too near its close for Barlow to think of seeing the general then, so, after leaving the sharpshooter, he went to a hotel and had his supper, after which he went out to take an evening walk in St. Louis.

The metropolis of the country beyond the Father of Waters is never a dull city, and on this occasion Max found enough to interest him.

What he saw need not be related here, except that part which terminated his evening ramble, and had a direct bearing on his past and future career.

As chance would have it, he saw no one that he knew, though he had some acquaintances in St. Louis; but, though he was in citizen's dress, he did not fail to attract attention from at least two men who were upon the street.

These persons started at sight of him.

"Max Barlow, by the fiends!" said one, who wore a long red beard.

"So it is, sure as shootin'," replied the other, who was blessed with a black beard of equal proportions.

The red-bearded man did not answer.

He was looking thoughtfully after Max as the latter walked down the street, and his hand, thrust inside his coat, was working nervously around some object which was invisible.

"Zounds!" he muttered, after a pause, "I am tempted to do it."

"To do what?"

"Knife that dog!"

The red-bearded man almost hissed the words, showing a fury but ill-concealed. His companion started violently.

"Bath, I can't do a woman. Come, now,

and ready to back me up, I intend to do the work with one thrust of my knife, but you must have your own ready and rash in if there is any hitch in the programme. Come!"

Then the would-be assassin strode away after Max Barlow.

CHAPTER IX.

KNIFE AND REVOLVER.

Our friend, the captain, had the air of one wholly at his ease as he sauntered down the street, and an observer would have said, too, that he knew nothing of what was transpiring about him except what occurred under his nose.

In thus thinking, the critical observer would have been mistaken. Barlow's peace-fair was as deceptive as the purring of a tiger.

During his life, he had seen a good deal of rough work. Through Missouri he had gone with his rifle and mackin, an adventure he had passed through amid the Ozark Mountains; while, a little later in his career, he had hunted wild horses on the plains of Texas, trapped the wily beaver at the head waters of the Missouri, and swapped lead with the border ruffians of Kansas.

Such a man was not likely to be caught napping anywhere, and Max Barlow was wide-awake as he sauntered along the streets of St. Louis, a place none too safe at the period of which we are writing.

Consequently, he was not long in discovering that he was followed by two men. He looked at them closely but secretly, and failed to recognize them. Why was he followed? It might be done for any of several reasons, but the explanation most reasonable was that they intended to rob him.

"This riddle must be solved," he thought, with perfect calmness. "Plainly, if they intend me harm, they will do nothing while I am on so public and well-traveled a street. A narrow, dark alley would suit them better. Gentlemen, I like to aid in a good cause, and I'll help you over the fence."

So thinking, he first looked to the condition of his knife and revolvers, and then turned to the right and sauntered along a street which was poorly lighted and but little used at that hour by pedestrians.

As he had thought, the two men followed him, and he was no sooner clear of the crowd than they began to close up rapidly. In so doing, they used a caution which was sur-

picious in itself, and Barlow could not doubt but that they intended to attack him in the back.

He smiled grimly and drew both revolvers from his pocket.

Nearer came the assassins. Their steps sounded close behind him. He measured their advance by the noise, cautious and it was, and prepared to play his part.

Suddenly he wheeled, and the assassins, pausing abruptly to avoid running full upon him, found a glittering revolver frowning at each of them.

"Good evening!" said Barlow, blandly.

"Can I be of service to you, gentlemen?"

"What kind of funds do you mean?" demanded the red-bearded man—for it was the pain with the profuse hirsute growth—recovering his wits with surprising quickness.

"I thought you wanted to see me."

"No, sir, we do not, and—"

He was speaking in a blustering way, but Barlow interrupted quickly, but coolly.

"Then why have you been dogging me for the last fifteen minutes?"

"We have done nothing of the kind," declared the red-bearded man, angrily.

"I say you have. I've crossed the street

several times since you fell in behind me, solely for the purpose of testing you, and you've followed as straight as though I was a tugboat. Now, here I am, and if you want anything of me, don't be bashful about asking. Spit it out!"

"I tell you it is a mistake—"

"It is one, for you to think you can take me unawares like a countryman. That party, however, immortal, will you show your hand or throw up the devil?"

"I have not hesitated."

He, of the black beard, was ambitious to cast off the grappling-irons, metaphorically speaking, and leave Captain Barlow alone, but his companion was less inclined to give up.

For reasons of his own, he hated this quick-witted man and aspired to end his career

then and there.

Just then, when the deadlock was at its zenith, occurred one of these comings and goings which are the bane of a city. Two small boys, one in pursuit of the other, rounded the corner at full speed, and before the forward one could check his speed, he went headlong into Barlow, nearly knocking him off his feet, and carrying him before the curb to the street proper.

It was an interruption which gave the red-bearded man a thrill of joy, and he leaped forward, knife in hand, to attack his enemy.

Great was his surprise, however, when Barlow's right hand revolver flashed, and as the lead grazed the would-be assassin's arm, and passed on its way, a yell of pain and rage from the black-bearded man, told that he had fared even worse.

The boy, almost in his face, disconcerted the leading villain, who first dodged, then paused, and, lastly, looked around at his companion.

He saw him flat on the ground, writhing in what seemed his death agony, while the two small boys ran away with shrill cries of "Murder!"

All this was too much for red beard, and with great alacrity he turned and fled.

Barlow, however, had become thoroughly aroused, and with his second revolver half leveled, he dashed after the runaway, ordering him to stop.

The red-bearded man did nothing of the kind, and he proved to be so good a runner that Max could not gain a foot.

As a result, he was about to give him a choice between stopping or receiving another shot, when, suddenly, the prisoner dodged into a very small and obscure alley.

Barlow, a little disturbed by the darkness before him, followed, and, though it was, in spite of this, his mistake, a misstep, and fell rattling down three or four stone steps.

He arose, a thoroughly demoralized man, who had collected to learn all about the murderer the boys claimed to have seen made good his escape.

The alley led to another street, and he had been effectively thrown off the trail.

Not much time did he spend there, but, retracing his steps, he reached the vicinity of the first trouble to find the two small boys the center of an excited group of men who had collected to learn all about the murderer the boys claimed to have seen made good his escape.

Barlow looked for the man he had shot. On the sidewalk was a small pool of blood, but no further sign was to be seen.

With puzzling over this fact, Max felt a hand laid on his shoulder, and turned to see Sharpshut, the scout.

"Come away, cap'n," said the latter, quickly.

"Why?"

"They boys hev described you wal, an' ef people get ter lookin' at you, there'll be an arrest, an' you'll languish in prison."

"I've done nothing to be arrested for."

"Still you may lose three mouths o' service at the front of you don't save your head."

It was a convincing argument, and Max followed the sharpshooter away from the crowd and the vicinity.

Barlow gave a clear account of all that had occurred under his observation. Then they weighed the fragments of evidence, and tried to form a theory as to the motive of the attack.

The most reasonable idea was that plunder had been the sole object, but the fact that Barlow was plainly dressed rather disturbed that theory.

Two questions remained unanswered.

First, why had he been attacked?

Secondly, what had become of the man he had shot?

The last conundrum was not less dense than the first. The black-bearded man had gone down promptly when shot, and was last seen by Max, had been struggling in what seemed his death agony; but in spite of this he had mysteriously disappeared.

Not to weary the reader with an account of all their surprises and speculations, let us briefly say that they decided they did not know the cause of the attack, that the black-bearded man might have pretended to be hit harder than he really was, though the pool of blood on the sidewalk showed he had not escaped injury to a certain degree; and with matters in this chaotic state, Barlow and the sharpshooter got together and went to his hotel to indulge in reflection; and, after writing in aid and exaggerated dreams in which black and red-bearded men played the parts of heavy villains.

The following morning, the veil of mystery was made thicker than ever by the arrival of a note, on which investigation, he found had been left at the hotel at an early hour by a small boy.

Receiving this note, Barlow sat down and read these words, which were written in a curiously irregular hand:

"CAPTAIN BARLOW. Do not let yourself believe that the attack last night was the work of common thieves or of political enemies. Look to private matters for a motive; but rest assured that your assailants intended to kill you. Their scheme will be carried out, but you will live to avenge your master for all time. You luckily foiled them then, but there will be further trouble. Be careful, or you will meet with worse harm. I will advise you to be on your guard. This warning comes from a friend who wishes you well. OZARK."

Barlow had greeted this extraordinary epistle with a whistle of amazement, but it was not until after inquiry had convinced him that there was no way of finding out the source from which it had emanated, that he sat down for serious reflection.

Then he plunged deeply into the guttural perplexities. Who was the writer? Who was the note? The scroll showed signs of an attempt to disguise it; but, though signed by so rugged a name, there was nothing to tell the sex of the writer. Friends do not usually give such obscure warnings; enemies rarely give any.

So, who had been the writer?

Again, who was the enemy referred to, and who had made himself so strongly referred to the previous night? The warning bade him look to private matters for a reason, but there he became hopelessly at sea. So far as he knew, he had not an enemy of social life in the world.

What did it all mean, anyhow?

CHAPTER X.

THE ROAR OF BATTLE.

Barlow had planned to visit General Fremont that morning, and, without allowing any new complication to interfere with his plans, he went as projected.

The Pathfinder received him cordially. Max bore a letter from Colonel Sigel, and, besides, Fremont had heard of him in connection with the irregular warfare in the Ozark region. He was glad to meet such a promising soldier.

Despite his encouraging welcome, the captain believed that he had presumed much in his course. He had a sort of wistful feeling for the brave man who had crossed the heart of the continent under such great difficulties; he had always regarded him as one fitted by his bravery and nobility to stand high among all men.

Now, on his own part, he seemed very small in such company.

He made known his errand briefly and modestly. He wanted active service, and, being tired of irregular warfare, had come to offer his sword to the ex-explorer.

Fremont looked at him keenly. He noted the fine, robust form and firm face of the applicant, and a look of pleasure stole across his face. Daring adventurer that he had been, his nature was still amiable and his heart large.

"I am glad you have come to me," he said, "though I have no vacancy just at present; or, rather, we lack the means of organizing the troops who are ready to pour to our aid when we can pay and arm them. When that day comes, I shall be glad to give you a place."

The Pathfinder paused, reflected for a moment, and then turned to an orderly.

"Send Major Zagonyi here," he said.

Barlow started slightly. He had heard of Major Zagonyi before. A Hungarian, who had been a soldier in his native land, he had come to the United States as an exile. Men said that he was brave and true, and that with him the art of war was a trade wherein he was expert. It was known, too, that he had offered his sword to Fremont, but just what was in store for the Hungarian, few knew at that period.

He came in promptly, a soldier in look and bearing, and Barlow did not find it hard to believe the reports he had heard of his valor.

The Pathfinder introduced the two.

"I shall be glad to have met Captain Barlow, for of him I have before heard," said the Hungarian, in his peculiarly worded English.

"And I am glad to meet the patriot of Hungary," added Barlow, promptly.

"Ah! you shall not flatter me now, for my small deeds sound poor to great words," remonstrated Zagonyi, with the modesty of a truly brave man.

"Don't quarrel, gentleman," said Fremont, smiling. "Save all that for the enemies of the republic. This soldier, major, is a true patriot. Where can we find a place for him?"

The Hungarian looked first at Barlow and then at the general.

"There are places," he quietly said.

"And he would fill any vacancy?"

"Well, general, well, I make sure."

"We understand each other, then. Captain Barlow, your offer is favorably received, and you shall see service near my own borders. Just at present, as I said before, there is nothing to be done here; but there is one place where you can use your sword with effect."

"And that, general?"

"Is with Lyon. As you are probably aware, the enemy is marching on Springfield, and a battle must ensue. If you wish, you can go there and aid the cause. When the fight is over, return here and I will find a permanent place for you. I shall offer you a choice between two positions. Major Zagonyi and myself have a plan in view which will call for some strong, active young men, and among these you will be welcome."

"I choose that position, then."

"As a private?"

"As anything?"

"You shall have your choice. Now, I will write a letter to General Lyon, which will probably give you a position near him during the coming battle. They will be waiting."

Half an hour later Barlow left the two officers, duly provided with a letter to Lyon.

Before leaving St. Louis, he called on Sharpshot, and had a conversation with him in regard to the affray of the previous night; but all their surmises failed to let daylight into the mystery. The scout expressed the idea that the note from "Ozark" was only intended as a scare from the baffled robbers, but the old fellow was sceptical.

Putting together the threads of evidence, he was inclined to think he really had an enemy, who deliberately tried to assassinate him; but who it was, and what was the cause of his enmity, could not be conjectured.

In conclusion, Barlow told the sharpshooter of his proposed journey to Springfield.

"Mobbe I'll be thar, too," said the latter. "I like the smell o' smoke, and I want ter get a crack at the enemy. I never was made for fightin' by word o' mouth."

They separated, and Barlow began his journey. He had much upon which to reflect. The military situation, his own future, the vague words of the Pathfinder, the night assault, the mysterious warning—all came in for a share of attention.

Like the hull between the acts of a play, he thought at times about Sharpshot. The

man seemed to be a peculiar character. A veteran borderer, he was uncouth enough of face and dresser, but his heart seemed to be true; and, somehow, Barlow was drawn toward him. Brief as their acquaintance had been, he was treating him as a friend, and he felt sure the confidence would not be misplaced.

One soldier arrived at Springfield on the seventh of August. It was a critical period with the Union fortunes in Missouri. General Lyon held the place with five thousand troops, among whom was Sigel, while a Confederate army of four times that strength was marching against them, led by Generals McCulloch, Price, and Price's son, General McCulloch, a ill-calculated for defense. Situated on an open plain, only a large army behind good fortifications could hope to hold it in battle, and the five thousand soldiers were too few for the purpose, even when led by so gallant a general as Lyon.

Barlow reported, and was quickly assigned to a position.

The war-cloud deepened every day. The Confederates came nearer, and finally encamped near the city, but still held the line in best of condition. During their march they had been on half rations, and had eaten green corn by the way; they were poorly clad, and in many cases only half armed.

On the ninth Lyon held a council of officers to decide whether Springfield should be evacuated or battie given the enemy. Neither plan proved satisfactory. To retreat was to lose valuable ground and breed demoralization among the royal maidens of Missouri; to fight was to risk the whole army.

Still, the defenders were brave-hearted, and they finally decided to risk all against their foe, outnumbered as they were.

On that day both armies were busy. McCulloch proposed to at once push forward on the town; while Lyon resolved to go out and meet his rival at Wilson's Creek. Better light than ever he was hemmed in at Springfield. Lyon formed his line, forming two columns, the larger of which, led by himself, was to strike the Confederate front, while Sigel, with the smaller, was to operate against the rear.

At five o'clock that evening the army moved, but it was an hour past midnight when the Confederate fires were sighted, and four hours later when the battle began.

The Union skirmishers sent out pickets back to camp, but when the Confederates awoke to the fact that while they had been preparing for a forward movement, they had been caught napping.

The Unionists moved with vigor after the pickets were driven in. A small force was thrown across the creek at a bend, to strengthen the left flank, and then the main body pressed forward.

The country was hilly and broken, and with so many places suitable for a stand and defense, the Union men, even in moment, thought to see their opponents in force.

Barlow had been placed at the head of fifty men with the rank of captain. His force was composed wholly of new recruits, but they were men accustomed for years to the use of the weapons they bore, having fought with beasts, Indians and border ruffians, and he had no fears as to their courage.

The grizzled old fellow strode near Barlow and often ventured remarks which were so sensible that the captain did not check him.

"Ef they knows their business, we'll see them soon," said the veteran. "They don't let all o' these hills go unprotected. Keep your eye open for sharpshooters, cap'n, an' ef they tries that dodge, jest let your bowlin' wildcats pay 'em in kind."

Barlow did not murmur, but the man's passing by was soon fulfilled. They were passing along the ravine, and as the ascent beyond was reached the enemy was seen in large numbers and awaiting their advance.

"Etarin tigers!" said the veteran, "hev we got ter swatier all on them?"

"If we do, we can't keep them down," said a man at his side.

"We'll be lucky ter get them down at all," added still another.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DEATH OF LYON.

While his men jested, Barlow was looking with considerable uneasiness at the force at the front. It was almost the entire body of Price's division, and the artillery yawning behind the infantry, looked grim enough. Fairly pitted the force would crush the Unionists by weight of numbers.

The leaders of the latter army, however,

were wise enough to go slow. The battalions of Major Osterhous, with several companies of Missouri volunteers, which included Barlow's, were thrown forward as skirmishers. Simultaneously with this movement, seven or eight "Totten" batteries, under Lieutenant Saksalski, began a heavy fire, and a little later, the whole battery coming into position, the slaughter of the Confederates began great.

They gave ground, very shortly, and the fighting became general all along the line.

Barlow's borderers were always in the thickest of the affray, and his only trouble was to keep them out of danger too great to be cured. They were told to forget there was such thing as caution, and in a word would have hurled themselves without support against the whole hostile force.

As it was, their fire was deadly and rapid. When not in advance, they fought in the old style of the border. Their leader, who had thrust his useless sword into its scabbard and was himself using a rifle, thrilled as he saw them battling.

Looking at any particular man, an observer might see a soldier lying flat on his back behind a rock or log, rapidly reloading his rifle. This done, he would whirl over, thrust out the deadly weapon, cover an enemy and pull the trigger. And they seldom fired in vain.

The roar of the battle was deep and heavy. Only the superior artillery of the Unionists had preserved them thus far, but the batteries of Totten, Dubois, and Steele were loaded with rare skill and judgment.

The fighting continued with varying fortunes, but gained advantage to either; but an event was at hand which was calculated to deal a great blow to the Union army and the North at large.

On the extreme right, three regiments of Union soldiers were fighting against great odds, and though they showed undiminished valor, it was plain that fatigue, thirst and the press of numbers was telling upon them.

General Lyon saw their danger, and ordered the Second Kansas to their support, himself accompanying it. A desperate struggle ensued.

The brave general rode along the line in the thickest of the fight, encouraging his men, and not heeding the bullets which whistled past him as though they had been common hail.

The Colonel Mitchell of the Second Kansas fell severely wounded, and the soldiers faltered. They were without a leader when one was most needed.

Lyon saw their peril and spurred to their front.

"Climb on!" he cried, in tones which thrilled them; "I will lead you!"

They rallied at his words, for all loved the brave soldier, and he looked like one sublimely gifted them, but they never followed him into action.

From the Confederate line came a rifle-bang which found a path to a target too sacred and noble to have thus stopped a traitor's shot.

Brave Lyon was pierced almost through the heart; and, falling into the arms of his body-servant, was borne away to die.

The end came speedily, and among the names of the martyrs who had died for their country, the revering angel wrote that of Nathaniel Lyon.

Terrible, indeed, was the calamity, but Major Sturgis, upon whom the command devolved, managed to hold the enemy in check, and the news of Lyon's death was not at once made known to the army.

While this sad event was transpiring at the right, the thread of our story was happening at the left. Barlow had been sent on the left.

The fortunes of war had left them at the extreme end of the field; and, suddenly, a strong force of Confederate horsemen swept from a wood and charged down upon them.

Barlow ordered his braves to stand firm, and many a saddle was emptied as the gray riders came.

Still, they were not checked, and with a ferocious roar to spur them on, they must engage in a hand to hand fight.

The dash of the cavalry had separated the borderers from the army proper; and, hemmed in alone in a small valley, they must fight against four times their number of mounted men, or take to flight and be cut down in their rear.

Terrible, indeed, were the odds. The horsemen were well armed, and their evident expectation of a quick and complete victory seemed well grounded.

Barlow's band, however, were resolved to die bravely, if, indeed, they must die at all.

"Men!" he shouted, "show your border fighting now. Up and at the enemy; and, remember, you fight for Missouri and the Union. Let them not turn on our backs!"

His men responded with a cheer, and then came the rush of the cavalry.

With sabers gleaming they swept on, planning to carry all before them, and this time there were no keen bayonets to dread. The riders were for shooting, not for close quarters.

What a surprise awaited the exultant foe!

As their horses' feet flung the turf into the borderer's faces, the latter sprung forward like tigers. Each man seized a horse by the reins and few there were who did not manage to avoid the downward stroke of the saber.

It was a grand picture, despite its horror as a feature of war—grand because of the lofty courage of the ex-Indian fighters. The greater part of them had dropped their empty rifles, and when their left hands closed on the rein, their right was busy with a long-bladed bowie.

Some struck at the necks of the horses, others at the riders, and others, still valiant, rode straight beside the grey riders and clutched at throat or saber-hilt.

Such a scene had not been observed at any previous stage of the battle, and it can only be likened to the leap of the forest panther which springs on his prey, and then is busy with tooth and claw.

Barlow himself, armed with his sword, had taken a firm stand to fight while life lasted.

The rush of the troopers seemed sure, at first, to sweep all before it, but, as they came, the Union officer first beat aside a saber stroke, and then, after a brief exchange of blows, sent the rider to the heart.

The fight went on.

Ten of the bordermen lay dead on the ground, but every one that lived had scored an enemy.

It was a wild, ferocious struggle, such as is rarely seen in battle.

The ex-Indian fighters were truly human panthers.

At this critical moment, when it seemed as though the brave fellows must every one die facing the enemy, came another of those fickle turns in the tide so often seen in warfare.

Without a word of warning, a body of Union infantry charged along the level of the valley.

Their movements made no sound on the soft grass, and the Confederates did not suspect that a force fully their equal in numbers was coming at double-quick.

It was a deceptive silence, but firm resolution was expressed in the faces of the newcomers, and the glistening of the sun upon their bayonets showed how they were going to attack.

The blow came.

Like a mighty, turbulent sea, the rescuers dashed themselves on the troopers.

This time it was man to man, and as the bordermen saw the turn of the tide, they rallied afresh and began to fight like fiends.

Ah! then how busy were those once-bright bayonets, always so terrible a weapon of war.

The alarm spread quickly; they faltered, gave ground, broke and fled.

A short distance the wielders of the bayonet went in pursuit, but it would be fatal to venture far from the main body of the Union forces, so they turned back.

The bordermen, tired at last of cheering suddenly saw that their leader was not among them.

Alarmed, they looked among the dead, but he was not there, and they could only conclude that he was a prisoner.

He was seen no more during the fight.

Let us see what became of him.

Hard pressed by an enemy, Barlow did not perceive the charge of the infantry until their blades were drawn, and he was still far behind when a Confederate, almost gigantic in frame, leaped from his saddle, caught the captain by the neck, though he had been a child, and laid him across his knees.

This unexpected maneuver, coupled with a furious burst on the part of his former adversary, had caused Barlow's sword to fall from his hand, and, as he lay thus, he found he had not a weapon upon which he could place his hands.

His struggles were in vain, for the Confederate had the strength of an ox, and Barlow was forced to lie in impotent rage while the troopers beat their disorderly retreat.

They went, and with them went Max, a

hopeless prisoner, and rapidly being carried to the rear of the Confederate line.

CHAPTER XII.

MAX BECOMES A GUERRILLA.

The battle went on with varying fortunes.

It was made up of sharp, decisive work; the destruction was often great, and, as long as life lasts, will those engaged remember the battle of Wilson's Creek.

Outnumbered as they were, the Union army would have been cut to pieces and hurled back to Springfield, only to fall completely into the hands of the enemy a little later, had it not been for the artillery.

Those guns had saved the day.

Trot and Dubois and Steele were at all times busy, and, where they used the cannon, the loss to the enemy was great.

These batteries saved the Union army at the last grapple of the day.

Deceived by a trick of the enemy, who showed a flag captured from the boys in blue, consternation had seized upon the latter, when Trot and Dubois turned their guns upon the deceitful foe, and, aided by a stout charge of the infantry, drove back the Confederates with heavy loss.

It was the right of the long series.

A nominal victory had been gained by the Union arms, but the foe had only retreated a short distance.

A council of officers being held, Major Sturgis resolved to retreat to Springfield.

They went, and on the way were joined by Sigel and three of the twelve hundred men he had lead to attack the Confederate rear.

Where had Sigel been during all the fight?

The story was soon told. He and his men had been deceived by the same low stratagem which had led to the capture of Sharpshot's command. A large portion of the dark, dense body of Confederates had shown a Union flag and so drawn Sigel's force into a trap, where the majority of them were captured.

The junction effected, as before related, Sigel, who ranked Sturgis, assumed command, and the broken army went steadily on toward Springfield.

Max Barlow did not accompany his friends. A prisoner in the Confederate camp, he had been huddled together with others, among whom were some taken from Sigel's command, and they were left in suspense as to what would be the fate of the latter.

Barlow was disconsolate enough. It was not in his nature to relish inaction when his efforts were needed in the Union cause, and since his capture he had seen with his own eyes how overwhelming were the odds against the little army.

When Sturgis retreated, his enemy had no heart for following him. They claimed the battle as theirs, but their loss was heavy, and they allowed the Unionists to go in peace.

Captain Barlow, as he lay among the other prisoners, keenly watched the scene around him; and, among other things, he discovered that Keeler, the guerrilla, was on the ground. He saw him once, only a few yards away, but the fellow remained ignorant of the fact that he was thus watched.

The scene had not changed materially when night fell over the battlefield and its vicinity. Some of the prisoners were deep in despair, while others, among whom was Barlow, were inclined to take matters as easy as possible.

He was weary enough after the day's fatigues to remain lying down, but he had no time to get a little sleep. Close at hand paced a guard. Barlow watched him indifferently for a few minutes as he walked his beat, and then closed his eyes.

Five minutes later he opened them suddenly. He had felt a touch on his arm, and, as he looked, he saw a man lying close beside him. Before he closed his eyes, the man had not been there.

"Hush!" the latter whispered. "Besilent, for your life!"

Max made no reply, but used his eyes well. The voice sounded familiar, but the darkness hid him.

"Do you know me?" continued the other.

"No," Barlow answered.

"I'm Sharpshot, the sharpshooter!"

The captain could not avoid a start, and again the last speaker commanded silence.

His face now began to be more distinct, and the prisoner saw that it was indeed the scout.

"Are you sharp enough ter kink out my plans?"

"I'll try," said Max, promptly.

"I'm tyar ter resuce you. I'll cut your bonds, ef you have any —."

"I am not bound."

"Good! Well, I want you ter roll safty an' slowly toward the thicket yonder. Go mighty slow, or you'll be seen. I'll stay right here. When you're through the trees, look at the foot of the biggest tree an' you'll see a Confederate uniform rolled in a bundle. Put that on over your' jest as quick as possible. When you have had time ter dress, I'll roll the same way an' jine you. Then we'll both be in gray, an' we kin easily escape from the camp. See?"

Barlow did see, and, though the undertaking seemed sure to fail, he was not disposed to let the chance pass untried. He pressed Sharpshot's hand and then began to walk.

Once only did he roll out at the start. Then he paused and looked about. The guard was steadily pacing his beat, the scout lay like one asleep and no one seemed watching the captain.

Again he rolled over. All remained as before.

It was a terribly exciting moment, but it was not Max Barlow's first adventure. He turned again, and yet once more, and still no alarming thing was seen or heard.

He was half way to the bushes. They seemed to stretch out before him like the welcome arms of a friend. He was in the midst of his venture, an' now would it end?

Steadily he moved on. Now and then, some of the other prisoners stirred restlessly, but no one seemed to notice his own movements. He steadily neared the bushes, and then, at last, reached their cover.

Arising to his feet, he looked back and saw the guard at his best. Sharpshot lay perfectly still on the ground.

"Brave fellow!" muttered Barlow. "He is a jewel of great value, just at present."

It was not time for delay. The captain entered the thicket, and, led by the bundle, and found it at the spot had said. He felt a momentary fear that it would not be large enough, but Sharpshot had made no mistake. In went on over Barlow's own uniform and fitted well.

He was then ready for the next step in the venture, and had only to wait for the scout.

At that moment, however, voices sounded at the edge of the thicket, and he felt a thrill of apprehension.

The unseen men began pushing through the bushes, and Max knew not which way to turn.

Trusting to the darkness, he stepped behind a tree and awaited in dead silence.

The men advanced, muttered among themselves, and paused, so that Barlow was actually among them.

He was seen. One of them addressed him carelessly, he answered with a rude dialect, and then stood firm, trusting to luck.

"How many are here?" one of the newcomers asked.

A count was made.

"A count sidesides yourself, captain."

The count included Barlow.

"That is enough."

Max realized that, owing to the darkness, the men had not suspected but what he had come with them, and as they had previously been uncertain as to their number, there was a chance that the deception might be continued.

Somehow, the voice of him who seemed to be the leader, sounded familiar, but Max could not place it.

I have a little work on hand which I wish to do secretly, and then return to camp without you all being discovered. Of course, we can go anywhere, for we are under no man's orders; but I want to keep the matter dark. You seven are ready to follow me, are you?"

Several of the men answered affirmatively.

"Then follow me at once. Walk in pairs, and keep close to my heels. Come on."

He started from the thicket, and the men began to execute his orders.

"Jones, I'm tyar ter kink walk 'long-side you all an' not quarrel."

A burly fellow addressed the remark to Barlow. It showed that the Unionist was mistaken for a man who bore the melodious name of Jones, and it also showed that the counterfeit Confederate must either fall into line or invite comment, and possibly discovery.

He longed to decline the honor tendered him, but dared not do so.

"I reckon we kin," he said, in reply.

Then he and the burly man strode from the bushes, side by side, with men in front and in the rear.

Barlow was in a state of mental demoralization. He was starting on an expedition of an unknown character; he was hopele

leaving Sharshot, and if the venture did not end in his discomfiture it would be a wonder.

Surrounded by these men, who were his deadly enemies, if they had but known it, he walked through the Confederate camp. Other men looked at them, but none in suspicion.

Beyond the heart of the camp, the leader panted.

"If any of you are short of weapons, help yourselves from that pile," he said, pointing as he spoke. "We want to go well armed."

It was a chance Barlow did not fail to improve. He did not have so much as a penknife, but from the pile he took a musket, a pair of revolvers, and a saber—the latter because he saw that his companions were similarly armed.

"Now for the horses," said the leader. "Follow me."

Barlow had been studying the last speaker, and trying to remember where he had seen him before, and now he made a discovery.

He was Keeler, the guerrilla! Truly, the Unionist was in dangerous company.

Rapidly he tried to form a plan of escape. He had heard that since the Confederate had lost his horse, he had sworn to kill the man who had betrayed him, and discovery would probably result in worse than ordinary captivity.

Once, Barlow was on the point of showing to dash away, but second thought showed him that the attempt would probably result in his sorrow, and he resolved to bide his time.

Going a little further, they reached a number of horses, and the guerrillas began to select such as pleased them, without a perceptible regard for previous ownership.

Barlow, who was not yet used to be fleet-footed, and when the other men swung into the saddle he was not far behind.

Keeler gave another order, and the party started at a walk, their faces due south.

They were fairly off on their, to Barlow, unknown expedition, and he was far from feeling at ease. Why he was not already detected he could not guess, but had he known how much he resembled the genuine Jones, he would have felt more at ease. This fact, together with the darkness, was greatly in his favor.

CHAPTER XIII.

KEELER'S LITTLE GAME.

Not far did the guerrillas go before Keeler put his horse into a sharp trot, and the eight men swept away down the road.

The leader and another man were at the front, while the others rode abreast in three.

Barlow was a good deal interested in this mysterious expedition, but he could only conjecture that Keeler saw a chance for plunder, and when anything of the kind was to be secured the creed and practices of the guerrilla forbade inactivity.

Whatever was in store for them there was at present no chance for him to escape. Riding as the center man of the first trio, he was literally surrounded by his enemies, and as long as that lasted he must think himself lucky if he was not stripped of his false honors.

As Jones, he was safe; as a Unionist, among such men and so far from others, he would probably get a send-off on his final worldly journey.

The country was as familiar to him as the palm of his own hand. Hundreds of times he had passed over it as a boy, and in his maturing years, while only a few miles to the front was the village where the greater part of his life had been passed.

This fact suddenly occurred to him with startling force. They were heading directly toward the village. Was that the objective point of their expedition?

The fear became a strong suspicion, and developed into conviction. Nearer and nearer they rode, until only half a mile lay between the two groups of old friends. He became greatly excited internally, for it seemed certain that the village, or some of its inhabitants were menaced.

Keeler moderated his pace, and paid more attention to his surroundings. He had but a handful of men, and if they should run upon any Unionists they might fare badly. True, the village was in the nominal possession of the Confederates, but not for the space of a moment was he in the power of that lawless man—in his own words, he "wanted them."

They did not enter the village, but, keeping to the east, rode slowly past, and in a short time entered a small piece of wood.

Barlow felt varied emotions at this stage of

their journey. It was in this very wood that Edgar Peterson had been hanged, and the mystery surrounding his subsequent disappearance was still unsolved.

Had he been taken away with life extinct and given secret burial, or had some friend rescued him in time, and enabled him to escape the clutches of Judge Lynch?

Whether as the case, it had been a sad affair, and Barlow shuddered as they rode under the trees.

His mind soon wandered to another subject, however. A hundred yards beyond the wood stood the house of Mr. Somers, and there was all that was tender in Barlow's life. He thought then of Olive, and wondered if Lena and herself were still astir or sleeping unconscious of the enemy so near.

What men and girls halt in the wood so near the rebels' country?

"Dismount!" said Keeler.

Men obeyed, and stood grouped about him.

"I will now tell you the work in hand," said the guerrilla chief, in a subdued voice. "In yonder house are two girls who are wanted by certain men. I want one, and another man wants the other. With your help I am going to take them now. Are you with me?"

"Yes," several of the men answered together.

Barlow, however, was silent. The announcement had fallen upon him like a thunderbolt. Hostile nations might arise in arms, battles might be fought, earthquakes might occur, and floods come, yet, to a considerable degree, his mind would be easy so long as Olive Somers remained safe and unimjured.

Yonder, that cottage, was the most sacred spot on earth, for it contained the woman he loved and hoped to one day call his wife. Now, as he heard the cool and villainous plans of the guerrilla, his blood seemed to chill.

"Good!" said Keeler, in answer to the response of the men. "I knew I could count on you, and you shall not go unrewarded. We shall meet with but little opposition. Only the girls and Abram Somers are there, and we will do them harm."

"We will hang him if he proves ugly," said one of the guerrillas.

"Let a knife or revolver do the work as circumstances require. Of course, if he shows fight, we must not leave him alive. Now, hear my plan, which is simple: We will surround the house, and I will knock at the door. Somers will open, and then we go. Next, I will state my errand and carry it out. The two girls, Olive and Lena, go with us; the old man is to be confined to his bed."

The cool villainy of the plan astounded Barlow, who clearly perceived that he had work to do. He blessed the lucky chance which had made him one of the party, even while he did not see how he was to successfully oppose Keeler's plot.

With seven men against him, it looked as though he was doomed to fail, if not to be slain in trying; but not for an instant did he shrink from the task.

Oliver Somers should be saved from these ruffians, or he would die in fighting for her.

Keeler gave his directions plainly, and, leaving their horses in the wood, they stole from cover and approached the house.

All there was peaceful and quiet, though the dull light from a curtained window at the rear showed that all the household had not yet retired. Barlow knew the light shone from Abram's own room.

He rode first to this vicinity and tried to peer within, but the closely-drawn curtain baffled him.

"Jones," he said, in a subdued voice, "remain at this spot, and don't let a soul escape. Hardy and Eaton, each of you take an end of the house, and the rest of you follow me to the front. Don't harm the girls, for I want Olive for my wife, but if the old man is ugly, sink lead as soon as you please."

Keeler's revolver was at his side, and when he finished, Barlow was pleased at the plan. By chance, he had been given just the position he would have desired, and he was resolved to move quickly when once free from observation.

The next few minutes were destined to be important ones in the lives of Olive and Lena Somers. Either they would be rescued through the strange chance that had made Barlow a temporary follower of Keeler, or else they would be in the power of that lawless man—in his own words, he "wanted them."

Significant words, though, as yet, not wholly explained.

An observer would have said that Barlow

had no hope of saving the girls. With seven men against him, his chances were indeed small.

The genuine guerrillas went to their several posts, and Max had the rear of the house.

He strode forward, and was about to tap the window when a hand was laid on his shoulder. He turned like a dash and saw the rebel who had been called Eaton.

"Don't be alarmed," said the latter, quickly; "I will be your friend, if you will let me."

"Ain't you my friend already?" asked the Unionist, recovering his wits quickly and using his disguised voice.

"I am, Max Barlow!"

This time the captain started even more rapidly toward the window. Signaling some ominous word that he had heard pronounced, when spoken by one of Keeler's gang.

"Hush! not a word. I say we are friends, and I will prove it. You are for the North and I love the South, but I am no bloodhound to dog women. I will aid you to thwart Keeler, if you will let me."

The man spoke quickly, and Barlow felt that there was sincerity in his voice, but it seemed so strange that he suspected a trap.

"Who and where he began?" but the other had stopped him impatiently.

"Max Barlow, will you ruin all? Keeler's knock may sound at the door any minute. Once and for all, will you trust me!"

"Yes," said the Unionist, quickly.

"Then do as I tell you. Let those inside alone, and trust to strategem. Let each one of us fire off one of the two revolvers we carry, in a rapid though irregular way, and then rush around the house, one on each side, with cries of alarm, shouting that the Northerners are upon us. That will not only put the inmates of the house on their guard, but will put the guerrillas to flight. I know their mettle, and, my word for it, they will go in haste. Will you do it?"

"Yes."

The manner of Eaton was so convincing that, for the moment, Max did not think that all this might be a trick to get his revolver discharged. He felt sure his companion was acting in good faith, and was willing to go with the tiding.

"Then, begin!"

They separated and each went to his old post.

A minute later, just as Keeler was about applying his knuckles to the door, a shot sounded from the eastern end of the house. A second followed, then one from the rear, and close on their heels came half a dozen in rapid succession.

The guerrilla had paused at the first shot, muttering a curse at what he thought an accidental discharge of Eaton's revolver, but, as the fusillade continued, his views changed.

"The game is up!" he muttered, with a curse.

Then around the corner of the house dashed Eaton, at the top of his speed.

"The Unionists!" he shouted, at the top of his voice. "They are on us in full force. Run for your lives!"

Swinging his revolver above his head, the speaker dashed toward the wood, and the guerrillas began to follow. Keeler shouted a command for them to hold their ground, but he might as well have called to the wind. When they fought, they wanted the odds in their favor, and they had no desire to figure as prisoners.

So finding himself deserted, the chief took his revolver and fled, and they went at full speed for the wood.

Two or three shots sounded shot in the rear, and one bullet whistled close to Keeler's head, thus giving fresh fuel to the stratosphere.

They reached the woods, gained their horses, and leaped into the saddles; and, as they did so, the sharp crack of a rifle sounded in the rear, and a bullet of lead tore through one of their horses.

No more was needed to complete the rout; but, as a side-show, several more bullets whistled past them, and they were all in accord as they spurred away in retreat.

One man was so surprised at the last firing as Eaton. He saw that Barlow, alias Jones, was not among them, but he had not expected him to follow so far. In fact, he was sure he had not, and the sharp, keen report with which the firing in the wood was that of a different weapon than that carried by

Keeler, who, then, had fired the shot?

Captnal Barlow had carried out his part of the plan, so far as the firing of his revolver was concerned; but he delayed so long in

joining in Eatou's alarm, that when he turned the corner he saw the guerrillas already in flight.

Pereyding this, it occurred to him that it was time for him to fall out of such dangerous company. Discovering a retreat trouble, if not an effort to get well to life, and, besides, he was not needed at the house.

Consequently, he paused near the house, and saw the gang continue their flight without any regret on his part. The possibility that they might return, caused him to hasten to reload his revolver, and he had just finished the work when they disappeared among the trees.

CHAPTER XIV.

ZAGONYI AND THE GUARD.

At the same moment the window of Somers' house was thrown open, but Max did not look that way. He heard a rifle shot among the trees, followed by several reports in a different key, and the fact caused him fresh wonder.

Just then, however, Abram's voice sounded behind him.

"Who's there?" he sharply asked.

Barlow turned toward the window.

"It is I, Max Barlow," he answered.

"What is the trouble?" The captain was closer and took the settler's hand at the same time beginning a hurried explanation.

He was not through, when he saw a man approaching in the darkness; but, as he cocked his revolver, the new comer spoke quickly.

"Hold up, thar; don't sling any lead—leastwise not at me. Spare your friends, Max Barlow, fur friends are skeere."

The voice was familiar, but Barlow stood in uncertainty until the speaker came nearer, and he saw the blooming face of Sharpshot, the settler's son.

"It's a little picnic you've been havin'," was the genial observation.

"How in the world did you get here, Sharpshot?" Barlow asked, in surprise, as he wrung the sharpshooter's hand.

He drew a long breath.

"I'll be shot if I skeereely know," he answered.

Just then the voice of Abram Somers again arose, impatiently demanding the cause of the recent firing, and Max turned toward the window.

Explanations ensued, and Somers was told how near he came to seeing his whole family in trouble; after which the scout related his story.

When Max left the battlefield with Keebler and his men, the sharpshooter was not ignorant of the state of affairs. He had promptly followed, and when they mounted and rode away, he, too, mounted and hung a closely on their rear as he dared.

Before the village was reached, however, and while going at full speed, his horse fell with a bresk and let him on foot; but, not in the least disengaged, he played the postilion so well that he reached the Somers' cottage almost as soon as they.

He was who did the firing in the wood, using first his rifle and then his revolvers; and Max was convinced that he owed a good deal more to him than his modest recital would indicate. Few men would care to take so long a journey for one almost stranger, while the way in which the scout risked his life in the Confederate camp was astonishing.

Such were the views he expressed; but Sharpshot only laughed.

"Nonsense!" he said. "Why should we be chickens all o' a sudden just because we are fightin' the white enemies o' the old flag instead of Indians? What I did was nothing."

Both men entered the house. Olive and Lena had retired early, but the fire had roused them, and they at once appeared.

Olive met Barlow in a manner which pleased him greatly. They were to join their fortunes in life some day, if they lived, and the was to one to stand on ceremony or legal modesty.

Lena stood looking at Sharpshot, who had removed his hat and thrust it under his arm. There was admiration on his face as he looked at pretty Lena, and when Max turned from Olive and introduced him all around, he took the hands of the ladies as though they were something inexpressibly precious.

"Handsome as Pocahontas herself, they be," he said afterward, to Max.

An hour passed in rapid and important conversation. The defenders of the cottage were told of the peril from which they had narrowly escaped, and Barlow urged an immediate removal to the village, where

they would be a trifle safer than in the lonely dwelling.

Thus they at first objected, but Sharpshot sided with his companion and they carried their point.

While they talked Max frequently looked at Lena and thought of Edgar Peterson. She showed fewer signs of sorrow than he had expected, but occasionally a look of sadness settled on her fair face, and he suspected she was thinking of the tragedy in the wood.

The matter ended in the closing of the house, and the two young people went to the village together, where Somers sought shelter for himself and daughters in the house of a friend. Max urged them to go to St. Louis as soon as possible, and so get entirely clear of the dangers of war, and they promised to consider the matter.

Morning was near at hand when our two friends set out on their return to the army. A horse had been found for the scout, and they went in good condition.

Keebler and his band were not again seen.

The Union army returned the fact that it had fought a battle, and found itself in no condition and had devolved on Sigel, as the next in rank after the death of Lyon, and he decided to evacuate Springfield and move to a safer place.

His successful retreat to Rolla is a matter of history, and though McCulloch claimed a victory at Wilson's Creek, he made no attempt to capture the rich train which went under the army's protection.

When Rolla was reached, Barlow prepared to keep his word to Fremont. He started for St. Louis accompanied by Sharpshot, who also, too, wished to see the general, and they arrived there in due time.

The captain remembered his adventure when last in the city, and wondered if he would see anything more of his mysterious assailants. Sharpshot was of the opinion that the attack had been nothing more than one of city bravos, but when the letter was considered, he was wholly at fault.

If it had come from a friend, his identity was well concealed.

Barlow reported to General Fremont, and heard the project to which the general had referred on the previous visit.

It was proposed to form a command something after the style of the Old Guard of the great Napoleon, and this command was to act as a body-guard for Fremont. They were, however, to be something more.

War was gathering force and venom throughout the South. The people of the states which had seceded from the Union were arming everywhere, and as matters then looked, hard fighting seemed in store for the defenders of the old flag.

To meet this emergency, only a comparatively few regular soldiers were to be found in the United States. The remainder of the defenders must be gathered from the people at large, and the majority of them knew very little about war, the use of arms, or the proper handling of forces when in the field.

Many officers, too, must be chosen from among these inexperienced patriots, and like everything else, the true soldier is only formed by a complete knowledge of military matters coupled with experience. Hence, another report for the general.

In forming this command, it was proposed to take use only of men of good character and sufficient intelligence to act as officers if ever occasion demanded. They were to be carefully and thoroughly drilled and made into perfect soldiers as soon as possible.

Then, as new companies and regiments were formed, and officers were needed, they were to be taken from the guard, which would then be kept intact in numbers by enlisting others, and they, too, were to be put into perfect order.

Such was the project. Fremont and his friends were to have a small but select cavalry corps, perfect in all things that go to constitute the soldier, and with each member capable of assuming responsibility when occasion required.

In putting this plan into effect, the Pathfinders turned to one man whose past experience and soldierly qualities made him especially fitted for the work of forming and perfecting the new organization.

This man was Charles Zagonyi.

As has before been related, he was a Hungarian who had been active service in his own country. Born with all the inclinations of a soldier, he had added experience to his natural gifts, and stories of his dashing valor had drifted across the water to the country to which he turned for refuge when political reasons made him an exile from Hungary.

So, to Major Zagonyi was given the duty of forming and drilling the guard, he to act as its leader when once organized.

This scheme had been working when Barlow first saw Fremont and Zagonyi at St. Louis, but the project was not fully ripe.

On the occasion of his second visit, however, all was explained to him, and he was given a choice between a captain's commission in the regular volunteers, or a position in the guard. If he chose the latter, he would be paid more than a private, perhaps, for so small a force did not afford room for many officers.

Still, he did not hesitate. The idea of the organization thrilled him. He remembered that the "Old Guard" of Napoleon, and believed that American soldiers were equal to French; he was fascinated by the idea of being near Fremont, whom he so greatly admired; and toward Zagonyi he was drawn by that unspoken bond which is between brothers.

He made his choice, and became a member of the guard.

Then followed drilling which would have broken down less hardy men. Early and late Zagonyi had his command at work. Beginning on excellent material, he pushed them rapidly. Good riders at the beginning were made better; they were taught how to best use their various weapons; and in drilling they were made remarkably perfect.

The guard belongs to history, and we will not tire the reader with an account of their life before active service. Sumice it to say, the work was bravely on.

And while they worked, Fremont was only awaiting for guns, men and other necessities to push forward against the Confederates, who were riding rough-shot over the greater part of Missouri.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PASSAGE OF THE OSAGE.

It was not until the last of September that Fremont's army was ready to move. Even then, it was not what the general wished, but he had used all the means at his command, and made it as strong as possible. Frequent calls began to be heard for an advance on his part, and he prepared to go forward with what he had.

Several Confederate armies were in Missouri. General McCulloch had abandoned that field of operations and gone to Arkansas, but Hardee was at Georgetown, Pillow at New Madrid, and Price, who had besieged and captured Lexington, held that post.

Guerrilla bands, prominent among which was that of Jeff Thompson, roved here and there, and Keebler's work was frequently seen as he and his rough band dashed about with no authority but their own lawless wills.

The guard was to accompany Fremont's army, and, of course, Barlow was to be with them. His soldierly qualities had so recommended him to Zagonyi, that he was already a sergeant, which was about as far as he could reasonably hope to advance while with the guard.

Every day was increasing his admiration for Fremont and Zagonyi. The grand Pathfinder was a man to esteem in every way, and Barlow never forgot those long rambles he had made through the ice and snow of the Rocky Mountains.

During this interval, he had seen or heard nothing from the men who had attacked him in the street, and, having decided that they were no more than braves, he had almost forgotten the circumstances in the excitement of his new life.

Occasionally he heard from the Somers, family through letters from Olive, though many she wrote never reached him. He had urged them to take refuge in St. Louis, but Mr. Somers was mildly obstinate and would not leave his village. Since the night of his discomfiture, Keebler had for some reason given the place a wide berth.

The passing days had thrown no light upon the fate of Edgar Peterson. From the time he was left hanging by the bouchers, he seemed to have completely vanished. Knowing how Lena was sorrowing over him, Barlow hoped to some day meet Sam Sibley, who had led the mob, and square the account.

The Union army was at last on the road. Composed of twenty thousand men, of whom five thousand were cavalry, it was divided into five divisions which were commanded by Generals Sigel, Hunter, Pope, McKinstry and Ashurst.

Marching in a course along the Missouri river, the army reached Jefferson City on

September 28, causing Price to evacuate Lexington, which place he had held since we marched from Michigan.

Fremon passed on, and somewhat more than two weeks later reached Warsaw, where he was stopped by the swollen waters of the Osage River.

Sigel, being at the advance, crossed the stream by swimming his horses, but the heavy guns must necessarily have a different footing for their passage; so, there being no bridge for it, the army halted to build a bridge.

The bridge was completed, the ring of the ax echoed instead of the voice of the rifle, and everything was done that was possible to expedite the work.

At this point came a rumor that a party of Confederates were hovering along the southern banks of the Osage, presumably as spies on the movements of the Unionists, and Sergeant Barlow was directed to take twenty of the guard and investigate the matter.

They swam their horses across the river, and, striking harder soil, set off on the venture.

A hardy and noticeable lot of men were they who followed our hero. Great care had been used in selecting them, and with their fine faces and forms, their dress a simple one of unadorned blue, no one could have found a fault in their appearance.

Not long had they been on the way when they were overtaken by Sharpshot, who bore a brief note from the Pathfinder. It simply said that, at our request, the scout had been added to the party.

Barlow was pleased at this, for he had learned to trust the man and believed in his sagacity, and once more they went forward.

Their attention had been directed to a small village eight miles south of the Osage, and they were not long in nearing the place. No enemy had been seen on the way.

Just to the north of the village was a hill of some elevation, and as they arrived at the top, Barlow had his men and looked down on the town and the river.

All looked peaceful and quiet, and he was beginning to think that no soldiers were there when he caught sight of an old, familiar glimmer in the center of the village.

He had seen something very much like it before, though he might be mistaken; it believed it was the reflection of a light striking on a bayonet. Bayonets, however, when they move along a street in this glimmer, are difficult to see, and a man in them, but in this case nothing was visible.

Only for a moment was Max at fault. The glimmer, which was composed of several points, went steadily along the street, and he soon suspected that there was a bank of earth near it, just high enough to hide the men, just low enough to reveal the bayonets.

"Nine or ten soldiers, I reckon," thought the sergeant.

He had hardly arrived at the decision when the path emerged from the hill and he distinguished several men in Confederate gray marching along in good order.

Sharpshot looked at his leader anxiously. That looked seemed to ask permission for an immediate charge, but Barlow desired more time.

He watched the enemy. They marched forward for nearly a hundred yards and then halted in front of the largest private house in the village. Then one of the swarthy intruders stepped forward, walked to the door, and applied the knocker.

It was opened, though Barlow could not see by whom; a brief pause ensued; and then the officer entered the house and the other men marched around to one side, where an outbuilding hid them from view of the watchers, and all were out of sight.

All this was of interest to Barlow. He slowly turned to the sharpshooter.

"What do you make of it?"

"On the outside the critters we are huntin', sure enough," was the reply.

"A few more questions? Do you suppose there are any more in the village? Why do you suppose they have gone to that house? Are they worth catchin'?"

"I opine that are only them, an' it's my idee they are among friends. Mebbe, the owner of the mansion is goin' ter give them a feed. Ef that ain't any more o' the kind round 'em, it would be a proper good place fer people to be. Seein' my menments."

"You touch hand-pun, every time, Sharpshot. I am inclined to think you have told the whole truth, and nothing else. Now, I think I will leave you all here, while I go on a scout, and learn. If there are really any more men about the village."

"That's my part o' the work," said the scout, eagerly.

"Just as you say; I'm too lazy to object."

"Away you go, and we'll wait for you yourself." So the scout, who was clad in the butter-colored garments which told no tales, went quietly away, and Max drew his troopers a little back out of sight and awaited.

Half an hour later, Sharpshot returned. He had not seen a soldier during his absence, but he had heard it said that Mr. Yeaton, the owner of the mansion before observed, was entertaining a dozen Confederates in his house.

Barlow's resolution was quickly taken. He himself directed him to the house, and they moved from the hill down into the village.

Their arrival created some excitement among the people, and, while many came boldly out to view them, others were not so bold, and every door and window was filled with these more timid observers. Quite a number of hardy men were visible, for Missouri had many men not then in arms; but the greater part of the inhabitants seemed to be women and children, with a generous sprinkling of dogs.

All were anxious to see the Union soldiers.

No hostility was shown them. Some black looks were bestowed as substitutes for blows, but Barlow shrewdly suspected that half the people were friendly to the cause of the Union.

Without addressing any one, the guard marched to the mansion. Not a person was visible. It had been expected that the coming soldiers of the party, they had seen would be followed by a band with the edict and the outhouse or the mansion proper.

Directing his men to surround the house, and allow no one to escape, Barlow rode near the door, dismounted, and applied the knocker.

It fell dull on the heavy door. He waited patiently for a response, but none came. Again he knocked. Once more all was dead silence inside the house. Outside, the members of the guard sat quietly and awaited further orders.

For the third time Barlow raised the knocker, and this time he sounded a double summons. The proverbial third attempt produced an effect.

An upper window was thrown open and a gray-haired negro looked down upon them.

"Who dar?" demanded the man. "A friend and a brother," said Barlow, with a sudden rush of facetiousness; then, more seriously, "I want to see your master."

"He am not in, sah."

"Open the door, or I'll burst it in!" shouted the angry Unionist, at the same time emphasizing his remarks by a kick at the inoffensive door.

"Hol' on, dar, hol' on!" cried the negro, in alarm. "Don't spile de paint, sah. I'll let you in, but dar ar no sojers here. Jest you see for yourself, sah."

CHAPTER XVI.

BARLOW GETS INTO TROUBLE.

The window closed, there was a period of silence, and then a shuffling of feet sounded beyond the door; a key was applied, the lock clicked as it shot back, the door swung open, and Barlow again saw the old negro.

He was dilapidated looking old fellow of about sixty, and evidently very bodily weakness, but Barlow, looking at his wrinkled face, was unable to decide whether he was an honest man or a rogue.

"Fore de Lord!" he said, "I hates awfully to let you uns in. Ole massa will skin my alive."

The Unionist was on the point of reminding him that beauty was but skin-deep, but he checked the unkind remark and substituted another.

"I am so sure so that your master is away. You look like a philanthropist and scholar, but your ways are dubious. I'll prove your veracity by searching the house."

Seven of the guard, besides Sharpshot, were just outside the door, and a motion brought them inside. The venerable negro held up his hands in horror at the prospective sacrifice.

"I ain't w' out about his work systematically. The house was composed of two richly furnished flats, a rough attic, and a spacious cellar. All these places were examined, one after the other, but not a human being was found.

The aged negro seemed to be the only occupant of the house.

Next, the outhouse was searched, but that was simpler than the first, and offered no possible hiding place.

Barlow began to be interested. He knew that, since the war began, many of the citizens had manufactured secret nooks where they could hide to be in possible enemy, and he believed much to the present ease.

Possibly the Confederate soldiers had slipped away, but he believed they were still about the premises.

"Unele," he said, confronting the negro, "you have been deceiving me."

"No, sah; dat is not so. I is only a poor ole niggah, but I is a gentleman ob my word. Dar is no sojer-mans hyar, an' dar was nobody hyar but me afore you come."

"I know you are a nigger, and the man seemed anxious to be believed."

Still, Barlow was not convinced. Matters seemed too clear for doubt, and he would have been willing to bet a good sum that the house had a secret room, or that a second cellar adjoined the first.

"Lead the way to your master's library again," he said.

"Fore de Lord? you ain't gwine to tech de books, is you? the hevites in, in alarm."

"An' you ain't gwine to tell the master, you will find me sold. Lead on!"

The negro began again, remonstrance, but Max cut him short. He remembered that when they first visited the place he had looked in to see only book-laden walls and scant furniture, but the place deserved closer inspection; and the slave's opposition only went to increase Barlow's suspicions.

Slowly the negro led the way to the library, and they entered. Barlow paused and looked around.

As had been said, the room was simple in all except its display of books. These were numerous. Shelves ran around and around the walls, and every niche was packed with the precious volumes. It was the largest private library our hero had ever seen.

The furniture consisted of a writing-desk, a table and three chairs; the walls were modestly papered, and on the floor was a rich, yielding carpet, curiously marked with large squares and small scroll-work between.

All this seemed simple enough, and more like the den of a student than that of plotters, but Barlow had come to test the question.

Going to one of the shelves, he saw before him copies of Shakespeare, Milton and their class, while just above were the heavy scientific works of the great thinkers of the world.

"Don't touch de books, sah," said the negro again.

The sergeant did not answer. He made a quick circuit of the room, sounded the walls where he could and reflected somewhat. He looked wise while doing so, and the black man must have been deeply impressed.

Still, he was soon obliged to confess to himself that there was no sign of a secret room, or any species of hiding place.

The mystery grew deeper.

He began to feel angry, and inclined to make the negro tell the truth. He turned toward the old fellow with a frown on his face, but it was fate that he should never prove his suspicion.

As he turned, the walls began to move, unless his eyes deceived him, and then he experienced a strange sinking sensation. All surprised him, for his first thought was that he was attacked by dizziness, a strange enemy for stout Max Barlow; but, following close on the heels of these rapidly passing thoughts, came a realization of the truth.

A portion of the floor was sinking beneath him.

When he fully perceived this, he threw out his hands in an attempt to grasp something solid, but only empty air was within his reach, and he went down.

It must not be supposed that all this had been slowly done, and that Barlow had stood still and let the floor sink slowly beneath him. Every reader knows how rapidly and oddly a person will reflect when falling; and, though the sergeant had experienced so many ideas, they had all passed like a flash.

The portion of the floor sank quickly and surely, and then Barlow shot downward.

The fall was one of twelve feet, but he was not injured. He struck the floor with his feet, and though he lost his balance and fell, he was quickly up again and uninjured.

A strange scene was before and around him. He had entered a room which was twenty feet square and well lighted, but the only furniture was composed of two chairs; the floor and walls were of heavy planks, and nowhere was there any sign of a door.

He did not see all this at first glance, for his gaze at once became fixed upon a man

who, with himself, made the sole occupants of the room.

This man was most peculiar in his appearance. Of middle age, he was rather below the average size, but his frame was compact and sinewy, and age had not seemed to decrease his strength and activity. His face was thin and dark, he wore a long mustache which pointed back toward his ears, and a long goatee, both of which were coal-black and added to his peculiar appearance.

His eyes, however, were his most remarkable feature of interest. Large, black, sparkling—they had a glitter and wildness which might have come of anger or mental disturbance.

Even then, Barlow thought how much he looked like a French sword-master he had known like St. Louis, but little time was given for reflection.

"Ha, ha!" laughed the unknown, while his open lips showed snow-white teeth which looked ominous in the shadow. "You take a strong liking of entering my abode, but I am right glad to see you."

"And who the dickens are you?" the astonished soldier demanded.

"Don't you know me?"

"No."

"Well, I might claim to be Cicero or Plato, or Alexander the Great, but to come right down to business, I am named Yeaton, and am the owner of this house."

"Ah! I have been looking for you."

"Well, you've found me, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Are you satisfied?"

"Partially."

"What more do you want?"

"I have found one secret room, with an occupant, and now I want to find another. I want the soldiers you have concealed here."

"Go and find them, sir."

The man spoke with all the calmness in the world; but as Barlow looked around he saw only the plain black walls. There was no sign of life. He looked back at Yeaton, to see a sneering smile on his face.

"You will first have to explain your trap to me," the soldier bluntly said.

"Easily and quickly done. I have no intention of hedging you in with mystery. I am a Southern man and true to the cause. My whole life and hope is bound up in the grand struggle my fellow citizens are making for liberty. Such being the case, I love those who are fighting under the new flag, and hate those who uphold the old. Believing that your world, as a matter of fact, surge around this region, I have a secret made for a place of refuge. Here it is! You have called it a den—how do you like it?"

"It is well enough for you," said Barlow, dubiously.

"Ah! But you don't like it! Good! You have cause to dislike it, for it is poison to all of your faith. Now, I'll tell you more. I have Confederate soldiers in this house, but they cannot be found. I concealed them when I saw you coming, and then myself retired to the den, and then myself to the world above. But, young man, you were too inquisitive, and that is why you are now a prisoner in my den."

CHAPTER XVII.

A FIGHT WITH SWORDS.

Barlow was beginning to recover his wits. The fall he had received, coupled with the encounter with this strange man, had for the time bewildered him somewhat, but as his self-possession came back, it was accompanied by anger at finding himself in such a situation.

"Am I a prisoner?" he demanded, in answer to Yeaton's last remark.

"Yes."

"My opinion is different. With my weapon in my hands and a score of soldiers outside, I consider myself master of the situation."

Yeaton's eyes flashed with new wildness.

"Ha-ha! You never made a greater mistake, young man. You are like a silly fly in the web of a spider. Very likely you think my den no more than a romantic whim which—"

"On the contrary, I know of others—"

"Wait. You know of none equal to this. The trap through which you feel is in itself a marvel. See! The iron has sprung back in place, and if one of your soldiers enters the room above, he will suspect nothing. Did you notice that the carpet was marked in squares? One of these is just the size of the trap-door. The latter falls, the piece of

carpeting goes with it; the door springs back, and the square of carpet fits into place. Is that cunning, or not?"

"It's cunning," Barlow admitted.

"It smacks of the tricks and traps of the Middle Ages, but it is all in earnest. Young man, when you entered here you were doomed. You are in the same case as dead. Under one of the planks I will infer your remains, and no other person will ever know what became of you!"

Yeaton's appearance had grown most terrible and unnatural. His eyes glittered like coals of fire, his parted lips revealed his teeth, his expression was like that of Mephistopheles in his sneering, triumphant mood.

Barlow was affected but not frightened. One thing was certain—the man was as crazy as any lunatic in a straight-jacket, and he would not be able to deal with him.

"I object to that part of the programme," he coolly said. "You mustn't saddle a horse you can't ride, Mr. Yeaton. I hate to interfere with your plans concerning the planting of your crops, but I prefer to be counted out."

The smile vanished from Yeaton's face.

"We shall see," he said.

He strode to the shelf on which stood the lamp which lighted the room, and from its further part produced a sword. He rested its point on the plank floor, and proved its wondrous material by bending it almost double.

"You are to fight against that sword," he said. "You see that you cannot break it; I will soon convince you that you cannot pass my guard, while if it comes to a question of strength of wrist, I will surprise you. Draw!"

Barlow was not reluctant. He was tiring of the delay, and anxious to rejoin his men. He drew his own sword with a spiteful hiss as he pulled it along the scabbard, and threw himself into the easy position of a practiced swordsman.

"This is to be to the death," said Yeaton, who had suddenly grown calmer.

"To the death be it," retorted Barlow, inwardly vowing, even as he spoke, that the man should live to guide him from this pen of his mad brain's creation.

Yeaton moved forward and looked his opponent fairly in the eyes. In his own black, glittering orbs was still a strange fire, and Barlow was more than ever convinced that he was really mad. Before he struck, one less strong of mind than himself would have quailed, but Max Barlow had looked into the eyes of a forest panther just before they closed in deadly combat, and he was not one to tremble before man.

Still he saw how perfect was Yeaton's position, and suspected that warm work was ahead.

The latter began the attack, and the weapons crossed with a spiteful clash. Thrice, Yeaton struck, and, then made a cunning feint, so closely followed by a lunge that Barlow passed it off, one of the buttons of his coat was touched.

His opponent smiled grimly. Self-confidence, and a complete belief in his destined triumph were expressed in that smile, but Max did not waver. His narrow escape had taught him caution; and, realizing that he had met a skillful foeman, he put every nerve into action.

Yeaton pressed the fighting. His movements were rapid and the pace of science. His hand moved easily at the wrist, and his strokes were bewildering. He drove Barlow slowly around the room, and with feint and thrust strove to ship through his guard.

Grand, indeed, was his work; but before the Unionist there seemed to be a wall of steel, and, though put to his best endeavor, he defended himself with remarkable skill and coolness.

Such a combat, if made in an arena, would have aroused the enthusiasm of the spectators to wild applause.

Yeaton clung to his work. His play was lightning-like, and the clash of the steel was terrible. The blades met, hissed and clattered, or glided caressingly over each other with that peculiar ring only to be thus produced, and still the fight went on madly.

Anou Barlow resolved to retreat no more. He stood firm and gave blow for blow. Every artifice of sword-play was used, and still neither had received a scratch.

His want of success served to irritate Yeaton, but it did not lessen his effectiveness. He sought to attack at every blow. He leaped offensive terms upon his foeman, and laughed and snarled alternately.

If there had been any doubt as to his insanity before, it was now gone. The man was as mad as a lunatic could be.

Never before had Max Barlow been so hard pressed, and he knew that his life hung on a slender thread. At any moment the madman might penetrate his guard; while on his own part, he was willing to confess he could not draw blood.

His only hope lay in his superior strength and skill, and these things, opposed to the unnatural propensities of a maniac, might not avail him anything.

It was a grand, but terrible, fight—a battle for life between men who were masters of every device known in the use of swords.

At last Barlow began to feel its effects. He had not spoken a word since beginning, but his breathing was not so clear as at first, and his arm ached from shoulder to finger-tips.

Neither could, by any law of nature, hold out much longer.

Yeaton's fury did not for a moment abate, and the other had good cause to remember that he had said it was to be a fight to the death.

The crisis came when neither of them was looking for it. While giving way, Barlow suddenly felt his heel strike against something. He reeled back, but, making a grand effort, would have recovered his balance had not the madman, seeing his accident, sprung forward like a tiger.

He made a desperate lunge—one which Max barely avoided—and the effort necessary to turn it aside completed the Unionist's misfortune, and he lost his balance entirely and fell to the floor.

Then Yeaton once more sprung forward, his sword ready for the fatal thrust, only to have Barlow raise himself on one elbow and parry his furious effort.

Then he began another desperate struggle, this time with the odds all against our hero, for he could neither gain his feet nor, in his present position, long hope to beat off the maniac.

It looked very much as though Zagonyi was destined to lose a sergeant of the guard.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE POOL OF BLOOD.

Meanwhile, matters bearing on Barlow's fortunes were transpiring outside and within the house.

When the sergeant went with the old negro to the library, he had left the remainder of his force inside, including Sharpshot, so far from the room with the trap that they heard nothing of what occurred.

Just outside the house, however, was one of the guard, who had been left to protect the front door. Other troopers were near at hand, but he, only, stood near the building.

It was at least half an hour from the time when Barlow and his searching party entered, that the guard began to hear strange sounds. What occasioned them, and where they came from, he was for some time at a loss to know.

The noise was a little like the dull clanking of machinery, but though the soldier looked around to the four points of the compass, he could see nothing which explained their source.

He grew puzzled and interested, and carefully analyzed the sounds. As a result, he finally decided that they must proceed from the cellar of the mansion.

So far, all was clear; but, what caused them?

He listened further, and gained a sudden suspicion. Dull and muffled as the sounds were, he came to believe that men were fighting with swords in a subterranean place.

Having arrived at this suspicion, he became anxious for the safety of those within; and when he saw Sharpshot through a window, apparently perfectly serene in his hideout, he hastened to tell him.

The sharpshooter came, heard, was himself aghast, but finally ended by falling into line with his companion's views. He, however, was at once alarmed. Unless the signs of the times were out of joint, Max Barlow was in trouble somewhere.

He turned and darted back inside the house.

"We've sat still too long!" he muttered, angrily, "an' this is the result. The varmints are p'nt' out the sergeant hot, I'm afeard."

Taking affairs into his own hands, Sharpshot sent three men to the cellar, while, with two others, he went to the library, to which room he knew Barlow had gone when he left him.

The apartment was unoccupied, and, as far as he could see, there was no trace of the treacherous trap; but up from the depths still came that

dull, clangring sound. It seemed to be directly beneath the library.

A man came up from the cellar to say that the clangring was to be heard there, but that it came from beyond the solid cellar wall.

"Bring an ax!" ordered the scout.

The man darted away, but before he returned the clangring ceased, and all was dead silence beneath them.

"The fight is over," said one of the guard.

"How has it ended?" asked one of the others, with a gloomy air which spoke plainly.

"Death to them devils of whom have done the scorpion harm!" hissed Sharpshot.

The ax was brought, and, without hesitation, he attacked the flooring. The carpet was torn up, and the boards beneath found to be arranged in the same deceptive squares that marked the floor of the carpet.

Mad Yeaton had planned cunningly.

Sharpshot, however, used his ax so expertly, and soon made a breach in the floor. Two layers of boards he removed, and then, below them yawned a black hole from which came no light.

A lamp was then brought, attached to a cord and lowered. It went down something like twelve feet, and revealed a square room, the floor and sides of which were of planking.

Still it was evident that the fighting, if fighting it had been, had come from there, and Sharpshot resolved to investigate further. The secret den was in itself suspicious.

A ladder was found, and lowered, after which the scout and one other man descended. They looked about, but there was no sign of any human beings except themselves. They sounded the walls, and found them apparently firm on all sides.

"Shoot me, if of it ain't queer!" muttered Sharpshot.

His companion silently shook his head. A rigid search had failed to find any sign of Barlow or the old negro in the upper part of the house, and the fighting and its ending gave the matter a dark and ominous aspect.

"I'll burn the house down if he ain't found," continued the sharpshooter.

"And I'll stand by the sergeant also."

"Sure enough, I didn't think of that."

The speaker looked keenly around the room. If there had been fighting there, it might have left some sign.

"Ha!"

Sharpshot uttered a cry, and strode to one side of the den. Upon the plank he had seen some object which showed redly on the dull-white floor, and the sight aroused a suspicion.

"What is it?" the latter asked.

He strode forward, and then, after a brief survey, turned a pair of startled eyes on his companion.

"Blood!" almost whispered the scout.

Then they stood together over a dark, red pool of something which was certainly blood, and which looked terribly suggestive just then.

"They have murdered the sergeant!" cried Sharpshot.

One moment's silence reigned in the den, and then the second man raised his head.

"Bring spades and picics!" he said, huskily.

"...and we will tear this place in pieces.

It will never do to have men say that Zagony's guard was thus outwitted!"

Meanwhile what had become of Max Barlow? Had he really been slain and left his lifeblood on the floor?

We left him fighting the maniac, *ala* Richard III., resting on his hip and elbow, and only beating off that furious attack with the utmost difficulty.

He believed that his last moment had come. He could not long hope to successfully oppose Yeaton while in that position, and even a blow would serve to exhaust still further his already rapidly waning amount of strength.

Still, he fought bravely, and as the maniac ent and slashed furiously above him, met each thrust with admirable skill. If he could only regain his feet.

Acting on a sudden idea, he watched his opportunity, and made a thrust at the madman's legs.

His aim was good, and he felt his sword pierce flesh, but Yeaton did not spring back as he had expected. On the contrary, he merely uttered a curse and pressed the fight more hotly.

Barlow began to feel terribly weak. He was almost tempted to abandon the battle and meet his fate, but he did not yield to the weakness. He fought on.

Suddenly, however, the scene changed,

Yeaton receded from the front, and Barlow thought he had leaped back, but as the sergeant seized the opportunity to regain his feet, he saw the madman struggling in the grasp of a third man, who had seized him from behind and saved Barlow; but the movement had brought himself into a desperate struggle where he seemed likely to get the worst of it.

"Quick, here!" he said, to the sergeant.

"Give me your help, but do not injure him bodily!"

Barlow did not recognize the speaker, but he hastened to his aid, and they united their strength against Yeaton. The result proved the unnatural prowess which madness gives to men. Yeaton was a middle-aged man, who would weigh less than a hundred and fifty pounds, while both of his opponents were years younger and twenty pounds heavier.

Still, with these odds against him, the maniac made a long and desperate struggle, and when they finally succeeded in overpowering and holding him on the floor, they were panting like chase-tired hounds.

Evidently the new-comer had been looking to the future, for he at once produced a quantity of cords which were wound around the maniac until he was helpless.

Then the unknown, who was on the eastern side of the room, manipulated the planks for a moment, after which they receded and revealed a narrow opening like a door. This done, he turned to Barlow.

"Let us bear him through," he said.

It was done, though Yeaton ground his teeth and looked the personification of fury. As they lifted him, Max saw on the plank a pool of blood, which had dripped from the sword in his leg, but it was not alarming, and a subsequent examination showed that Barlow's sword had merely pricked the flesh.

Passing through the opening, they entered another room, which was ten feet square. At one side stood a bed, and upon this they placed their prisoner.

The stranger closed the door, and, returning to the bed, looked sadly down at the maniac, who had grown calm if not reconciled.

The light was dim, but, despite this, it seemed to Max that he had seen this man before. Face, form and voice were familiar, but he could not place them. He was, however, prepared for anything, and he looked calmly on, while the man began to pass his hand caressingly over Yeaton's forehead, at the same time murmuring to him as though he had been a child.

CHAPTER XIX. THE GUERRILLAS APPEAR.

The cause and effect of the stranger's singular actions were soon seen. Under his efforts, Yeaton at first struggled as though to throw off a millstone, then wavered, and, as his eyes lost their wild glare, grew gradually calmer, until, with his face peaceful, his eyes closed, and he seemed to be falling heavier.

Barlow silently watched. He was past being surprised. The place was like an old feudal castle, where all things possible were liable to occur. He would watch and wait.

Anon, Yeaton seemed soundly sleeping, and his mesmerized turned to the Unionist.

"Do you know me, Max Barlow?" he asked.

"I have seen you before, but I cannot place your face," the sergeant answered.

"You saw me at the Somers' cottage the night we tricked Keeler."

"Ha! You are Eaton."

"Eaton or Yeaton—it is all one. The latter is my name, but the boys did not catch the first letter when I joined the army, and I am known by the former. This man is my father."

He pointed to the maniac, but the calm, negroed visage indicated that he was not going to call Barlow to account for having engaged in the fight.

"As you have seen," continued Eaton, as we will still call him, "he is mentally deranged. He has been slightly so for years, and has done no work, except to pore over his books. Since the war commenced, he has gone from bad to worse. An ardent belief he had gained of the Confederacy cause, he has given himself over to the desolation being wrought in the south, especially in Missouri. You have seen these underground dens. They were made under his directions, and are the creations of a madman. I was here when they were being constructed, but I little thought they would ever be used, and humored him in his whims."

"I am sorry to have drawn my sword upon him."

"Don't mention it, sergeant. Of course you could not stand still and be cut in pieces. I say this assuming, that he began the fight. Tell me about it."

Barlow obeyed. Eaton listened attentively, and then sighed heavily at the end.

"Poor father!" he said. "He deserves my猛烈的 affliction. Now, a word of explanation to you. The soldier who entered here are gone. They only stopped for a bite of food, and had left the village before you came. One thing more, to explain how I came upon the scene when I did. I was in the house during all your search; but, with my knowledge of the place, I easily evaded you, and, when I heard the clash of steel, I hastened to the scene to end it. Now, Barlow, I am your prisoner. You have a score to settle with your own man."

Max looked at him with astonishment.

"Do you expect me to say yes?" he asked.

"We are enemies of war."

"But not at heart. We serve under rival banners, but I would deserve hanging if I made you my prisoner now. No, Yeaton, you are as free as the air. You have saved my life to-day, and at the Somers' cottage you."

"Helped to save one dearer to you than your own life," finished the Confederate, smiling.

"That is it, exactly. Now, you cannot expect me to be so base a villain as to make you prisoner."

"Have your own way, my dear fellow, but it is only right that I should tell you I have only been repaying a debt. You remember the ambush in the pass?"

"I was there, and a fall from the rocks knocked me senseless. When I recovered, one of your soldiers placed a knife at my throat, to end my career, but you dragged him back and administered a severe reproof. You saved my life that day, and I am not ungrateful."

"Then we are even. Your hand, Eaton!" They crossed palms then and there, and from that hour neither would do the other an injury.

"Eaton," said Barlow, suddenly, "can you tell me who wrote the note that brought that ambush upon us?"

The Confederate hesitated.

"I am not sure that I ought to tell so much," he said, "but as it is a personal, not a national affair, I will inform you. Captain Keeler wrote the note, using information given him by Sam Stiles."

"He deserves more than a cursing; he ought to be hung by the heels."

"I see so much plainly. Stiles was in my band and knew our secrets, but he was a traitor and carried the news to Keeler, who wrote the note. But, Eaton, that note was in the handwriting of Edgar Peterson, and was signed by his name."

"Keeler is a cunning pennant and imitated his writing."

"But what was the object?"

"The sky hangs a tale. Unknown to you, Keeler has long been a suitor for the hand of Oliver Somers, while Sam Stiles was equally infatuated with her sister, Lena. Neither man had confessed his passion, so you had no clew to guide you when you tried to think who might have committed the forgery. The pair of villains thought to remove both you and Peterson by their plot. You were to be slain, and one of their tools, who was afterward to leave the letter where it would be found, and raise a hue and cry after Peterson. See?"

Barlow did not last, and he knew why Sam Stiles had led the lynchers against Edgar. He hastened to ask if Eaton knew what had become of the victim of the tragedy in the wood.

"He is dead. Keeler found him hanging to the tree and he was cut down and buried by one of his men."

"Do you know this to be a fact?"

"Keeler told me so, and it was from his own lips I got all the other information I have given you."

"Poor Edgar!"

"Let me say here, too, that I have never ridden with Keeler since the night attack on Somers' cabin. His repeated villainies were more than I could bear. He is not the true son of this earth."

"Did he suspect you that night?"

"No. I fired one shot of my revolver through my sleeve, and, as it chanced to graze my arm, he thought I had narrowly escaped death. But, captain, this talking

will not do. Your men will be worrying about you, and I am not sure but you are liable to be surprised by Confederates. How do we part?"

"As friends, and here. I will lead my men from the house and back to camp, leaving you with all good wishes."

He glanced at the elder Yeaton, who was sleeping serenely.

"I can easily care for him," said the son. "My control over him is complete, and when he wakes he will be as calm as ever. Go, now, and look for yourself!"

At this moment they heard excited voices in the larger of the two dens, and opening the door, Barlow saw Sharpshot and his men grouped around the pool of blood.

They greeted him with cheers, some explanations were made, and then Barlow bade Eaton farewell, and led the way to the upper part of the house and the outside.

Nothing was seen of the men and negroes.

The negroes, called together, they mounted, and all was ready for the start. Barlow had recovered his self-possession and nearly all of his strength, and in his placid manner there was nothing to tell that he had just passed through the most desperate adventure of his life.

He was about to put his command in motion when a cry from Sharpshot attracted his attention. The scout stood with one hand pointing up the street.

"Look-a-thar!" he said.

Barlow looked, and then he did not need to ask the cause of the scout's words.

Up at the further end of the street he saw a line of cavalry, two score strong, and garbed in Confederate gray. More than that, they were coming down at a trot.

"Two to our one," said Barlow, coolly. "I think we will take to our heels, since one can gain nothing by fighting. Face the other way, boys—forward, quick trot!"

The order was obeyed, and the boys in blue swept down the street. A series of yell's came from the Confederates above, but they remained silent.

The line was small, and the members of the guard would soon have been beyond it, but they had not gone fifty yards when, from behind houses and other places of concealment, came a second body of Confederates, who systematically placed themselves directly in the road.

Being thus placed between two fires, Barlow looked for another avenue of escape. The life of every member of Zagonyi's guard was a precious thing, and he could not afford to lose men by a brilliant but futile charge.

He looked to the north, but there, too, was a squad of troopers, and at the South a fourth party, now forming in line, all in Confederate gray, all well-armed and mounted, and all drawing in toward the handful of Unionists.

It was an exciting and ominous situation, for they were hemmed in, and with only twenty men to oppose to at least six times that number.

It was a time, too, for prompt planning and equally prompt action, for, unless they were to surrender tamely, they must speedily cut their way through or be annihilated.

CHAPTER XX.

A DASH FOR LIFE.

Sergeant Barlow had no thought of surrender. It would never do for it to be said that, so soon after their formation, a portion of Zagonyi's guard had been cut off and captured without a blow in defense, while such a calamity was to have been the death-blow to his own men during the war in Missouri.

"Now they must escape or die fighting."

"Boys!" he cried, holding his sword on high, "we are going through those fellows like a hurricane. Remember we belong to Zagonyi's guard and fight like tigers. Let your battle-cry be, 'For Fremont and the Union!'"

The gallant fellows answered with a cheer. Brave were they as men were ever made, and each one was anxious for service—auxiliary to win glory for the guard.

The delay had been shorter than the time consumed in calling the men, but, already, the Confederates were fast closing in and the decisive moment could not be averted.

Barlow gave a clear command, and the guard swept away toward the North at their topmost speed.

This course had the effect of leaving three of the hostile detachments somewhat in the rear, but it would speedily burl them against the fourth, which was twice their own numbers; and that this party was not reluctant to meet them was shown by the

way in which it dashed forward to the encounter.

Plainly, the two forces would meet at full speed, and then—Well, what then? Armed alike, with sabers in their hands, and revolvers in their belts, it was plain that neither intended to use carbines just then; but with the force of numbers against them, the outbreak was not promising for the guard.

In dead silence they rode until near the enemy, and then a great shout pealed from their throats in tones of thunder:

"Fremont and the Union!"

It was a yell which might have sent terror to foes less brave than the Confederates, but they were made of the same blood as the Unionists, and they sent back a defiant shout.

Then, going at full speed, the rival forces met.

The shock was terrible—the encounter was one which cannot be properly described. So many points might be touched upon, though none clearly, that we may well hesitate what ones to particularize.

When they struck, some horses were thrown down, and a few riders lost their seats; horses reared high in the air, often striking out with their forefeet, and, afterward, viciously kicking with their hindmost ones; sabers gleamed brightly in the setting sun; revolvers cracked and boomed all, arose the deafening shout of the guard:

"Fremont and the Union!"

It was a terribly grand scene, for such men fight only like heroes, but it was one too confused to be described. Men and horses were mixed together in utter confusion, and it almost seemed as though none would ever come out of that grapple alive.

Yet in war, as everywhere else, strange things sometimes happen.

One minute it looked as though every man must go down under the shock, the next, as though all were hopelessly tangled, while at the third minute they burst out of the mad knot, their faces toward the North, their sabers red with blood, and their faces curiously streaked and spattered with black and red—the combined results of smoke and blood.

These men wore uniforms of Union blue. Zagonyi's braves had cut their way through.

Stranger yet, all were there, though three or four were a little behind, and leaping into the saddles of Confederate horses they had secured to replace their own death-smitten ones.

At the score of men had gone straight through their foes without losing a man, though more than one gallant fellow in Southern gray lay silent in death on the ground.

Barlow's heart thrilled with joy. It was far more than he had dared to hope, but the other divisions of the enemy were fast advancing and only awaiting a chance to fire without hitting their comrades.

"For Fremont and the Union—run!" shouted Sharpshot, in exclusive exultation.

It was an order not to be found in like words in any book of military tactics, but the troopers understood and obeyed. They gave their horses the spur, and away they went, this time with all the enemy in the rear.

Soon, bullets began to whistle around them, but the distance was too great for accurate shooting, and one man only could afterward show the effects of the shooting. He had received a scratch on his shoulder, the insignificance of which he afterward lamented.

Wounds, in the opinion of the guard, were an honor in such a cause.

Sharpshot looked around, waved his hand and shouted a defiant cry, and then the race fairly began, for the enemy were not disposed to let the Unionists escape so easily, and in a confused body the hundred odd men came sweeping after them.

Barlow was not at all over by any means, but Barlow was full of hope. All depended on the quality of the horses, and the sergeant knew what theirs were. In forming the guard, Zagonyi's supervision and care had gone so far that not a horse was accepted until he had personally examined it.

The fugitives had taken to the road leading toward the north, for, although it was not a direct course, the footing was good, and made accidents less likely to occur; and along this way they went in an orderly manner which would have delighted Zagonyi.

Many of the brave fellows had wounds received in the hand to hand conflict, but they laughed at the flowing blood, and those who

had received no such marks of honor looked disappointed and troubled.

Was the Old Guard of Napoleon made of better stuff?

Two miles were passed at the same rapid pace, but, good as their horses were, it was plain that those of the pursuers were nearly, if not quite, their equals. They kept provokingly close and Barlow did not feel at ease.

More than this, he suspected that the enemy were of Keeler's lassies band. He had been told of the right of that man himself, and he who rode at the front and directed movements was a stranger; but, just the same, our hero believed them to be of the same gang which had already given him so much trouble.

The Unionists swept around a long bend in the road, and then started with apprehension. Directly in their path, half a mile away, they saw another body of graycoats. These men were moving about in a way which at once explained their movements.

An officer was directing sundry movements, and Max comprehended all immediately.

They were of the same party then in pursuit, but, by riding across the fields, in a direct route, had gained the front, and, if appearances went for anything, were then engaged in forming an ambush for the Unionists, little suspecting that the friendly lay of the land betrayed all their movements to their intended victims.

There was but one way to avoid the new danger, and the fugitives turned promptly from the road, set their faces toward the Ogallala, and rode rapidly.

Up to this time they had not been seen by the ambushers, but as they galloped over a firm, wide prairie there was a sudden commotion among the Confederates; and then the ambushing scheme was abandoned, and they came dashing across the field in a course intended to intercept the Union riders.

"Do they want ter get hurt?" demanded Sharpshot, as he nervously fingered his rifle.

"I should say their purpose was to do the hurting," said Barlow.

"Will it work?"

"I reckon so. There are no more than forty men there, and if we don't make matters unpleasant for them, I am no prophet. We will give them a taste of lead."

He spoke to his men, and they looked to their fire-arms. They could shoot as well as ride and use saber, these men of the Pathfinder's guard, and their movements were all in the line of business.

On came the Confederates, and it was evident they would be intercepted unless the enemy was given a check.

Sharpshot opened the ball. His long rifle went up to his shoulder, remained stationary instant, and then, as he pressed the trigger, sent a bit of lead on its mission.

Close on the heels of the sharp crack came an unilitary movement on the part of one of the Confederates. He reeled, clutched violently at the horn of his saddle, and then went to the ground in a heap.

The shot was a signal for the other Unionists. They began to fire in an irregular way, each picking his man and pulling the trigger when it suited himself, and the result was more deadly than Barlow had dared hope.

The gray riders were heavily stricken. They tumbled off their horses, one by one, and the front rank seemed shaken as by a tornado.

CHAPTER XXI.

ON A SCOUT.

The Confederates were heavily stricken, and they wavered and lost heart before that deadly discharge. Still, they were brave men, and he who rode at the front was seen giving them words of encouragement.

Sharpshot saw what he needed. He had reloaded his rifle, and, once more glancing about the barrel, he covered the leader and fired. Seemingly, he never fired in vain; for, at the crack, the man went down in a heap.

The last calamity was too much for the other men. They pulled in their horses and stood in a body over their fallen leader, while the Unionists swept on their way.

Danger was not yet past, however. The main body of the enemy was still thundering in the rear, and the course they had taken led them to the Osage, some distance east of their camp.

If the pursuit was continued, the passage of the river might be made an unpleasantly warm one, under the combined influence of lead and the rapid, swollen waters.

Barlow was never more in earnest in his

life. Thus far he had brought his command without the loss of a man, and he wished to report to Zagonyi with the whole gallant force at his back.

They rapidly neared the river, but not one of the boys in blue knew the country well enough to know the nature of the crossing they were about to undertake. They might strike the river where steep bluffs would prevent any passage whatever, or where the water ran so swiftly that their horses would lose headway and expose the riders to the shot of the enemy.

The only hope lay in chancing upon a spot where they could quickly enter the stream, and then meet only tolerably tranquil water.

Sharpshot turned to Barlow as they neared the river.

"Sergeant, I have a proposition. I'll drop out o' line—hide, an' arterwards watch the Confederates a bit. El Zagonyi will come, cross the Osage jest beyond the bridge, an' I will join you, explain whar the guerrillas be, an' lead the guard against them. See?"

Barlow comprehended and was convinced. He said as much, and Sharpshot looked for a chance to drop out of his command by the pursuit. He was going to venture much, but Max had confidence in his sagacity, and spoke no words of caution.

The fugitives swept through a hilly wood, and the scout turned sharply to the left and made for cover. His chances for being unobserved were good, for not only was the character of the ground favorable, but darkness was beginning to settle over the scene.

Barlow and his troopers went on, and the Confederates faded in the rear, and the critical moment was not at hand. A hundred yards ahead rolled the waters of the Osage, and all depended on the nature of the river and its banks.

The sergeant looked eagerly ahead. A line of trees fringed the stream and kept him in suspense; but he began to feel sure that there were no bluffs.

Still on—they then through the line of trees. The Osage lay before them.

In the rear came the pickets. They knew the country better than the Unionists; and they knew, too, that their only hope lay in firing on the little band while they were crossing. Beyond the Osage they dared not go.

Half way across the Unionists heard a series of yells in the rear. Then the bullets began to spatter in the water. They came hissing, and each one as it struck sent a spittle little jet of water, splashing the riders, and making echoes to the dangerous music of the carbines.

Still, the god-forsaken fort which had all day hung around the desolate band did not desert them. Through the shower of lead they went steadily, and the further bank seemed reaching out to meet them.

The growing darkness served to bother the marksmen, and that same darkness served to add to the picturesqueness and wildness of the scene.

The wide river, tree-lined, the swimming horses and their riders, the grim marksmen on the southern bank, the firebrands showing red in the trees, the moon, the combined, made a picture worthy of an artist's touch.

Still nearer to the friendly bank—then the foremost horse touched land and emerged from the water; others followed, and amid another chorus of yells from the enemy, this time angrily pitched, and amid a parting volley, the little band gained the cover.

The Osage was safely passed.

They turned in their saddles, sent back a hearty cheer, and then, without delay, disappeared among the trees.

Baffled, the Confederates stood for a moment on their own bank, and then went suddenly back.

Wherever he may have been during the chase Keeler was then there. The guerrilla band was his, and his curses arose warmly as he led them away from the scene of their final failure. He had lost many a man by the day's work, and none of those left under his banner dared address him at that moment.

He led the band a mile back from the river, and encamped in a wood. Whether he was foolish enough to believe there would be no return movement against him, or whether he was reckless of consequences, is uncertain; but he went into camp for the night, merely throwing out pickets as a protection against surprise.

They made their supper of food already in their hands. Then Keller called one of his men. He came, and proved to be Sam

Stiles, our old acquaintance of lynching fame.

"Sam," said the chief, "you are a bold man."

"Wal, sorter," the fellow acknowledged, looking curiously at his leader.

Lieutenant Mooney was killed to-day. You shall have his office on one condition."

"Name it."

"It is merely that you kill Max Barlow."

"Why didn't you do the dead-to-day, if you hankered?"

It was a timely question, but the man's manner also lacked respect. Keeler frowned, and a reproof trembled on his lips, but he thought better of it and swallowed his choler.

"I had no proper chance, as you well know. But, in regard to Barlow: You know my reasons for hating him. He is my rival in war and love. While he lives, I can hope nothing with Oliver Somers. If you'll do that, and swear the sod, I'll make you my lieutenant."

Sam grinned like one who sees a joke of broad and expansive proportions.

"I don't hanker," he frankly acknowledged. "I have got a sore spot in my ribs to-night, which recalls a scene which occurred a few weeks ago in St. Louis. Two men, one with a red beard an' other with a black one, tried to get the best of a single man. I looked over him, and with both hands an' then I plucked his for all it was worth. Result was, I got a lead pill in my ribs, an' you had to send for your life. No sir-e-e, I don't care ter tackle Max Barlow. I'll do anything else you say, though, ter prove my fitness for the lieutenancy."

"The office will remain unfilled until Barlow is killed. Then, the man who does the business, gets the office."

"Count me out altogether, then," said Stiles, with a broad, easy smile.

Keller glared at him angrily, but made no reply. Sam was never duly respectful to them, but they had been in more than one piece of rascality together and might again hunt in pairs.

As Sam's words have shown, they were the mysterious night assailants of Barlow, in St. Louis, where they were operating in disguise.

Stiles had received a bad wound, but he managed to get away from the scene of the affray, and, in due time, wholly recovered except for the "sore spot in his ribs," as he called it.

Before further words had been spoken, two of the pickets entered the camp with a third man walking between them. One glance was enough to show him a prisoner. He did not wear Confederate gray, and bonds were on his arms, though he walked boldly and held his head higher, if anything than the captors.

Keller started and thrilled with surprise. This man was no stranger to him, though he had never seen him until the beginning of the war. He had seen him first, when, in the previous June, Lyon and Jackson fought near Booneville, again during Sigel's battle with Jackson, and still again at Wilson's Creek; and he had often seen him skulking about his camp in an ominous manner.

The prisoner, whom he knew to be a Union spy, was a friend Sharpshot, the sharpshooter. He had ventured too near the guerrilla camp and had been overpowered after a hard struggle.

"Halloo!" said Keeler, "you here, my fine fellow?"

"As you observe, kurnel," said the scout, coolly.

Sharpshot spoke with a blandness which was admirable, but he knew very well that he was in a close corner. Keeler was a man who did not practice mercy, and a spy never gets any too much of the article, whatever may be the need of his captor.

Sharpshot, however, was resolved not to play the coward.

"I suppose you were with Barlow to-day," answered the guerrilla. "You hang around him all the time. Probably, you are trying to absorb style from Fremont's high-toned guard."

"That same guard will some day absorb you, you gang, head and heels."

"I only want to meet them," said Keeler, boastfully.

"They would swaller you at one mouthful. You don't know Zagonyi. See that you don't get acquainted with him."

"Enough of this talk; I am going to deal with you while I have a chance. Stiles, bring a rope."

The man stalked away, followed by a sarcastic comment from the prisoner, but soon returned bearing a rope. It was noosed

over Sharpshot's head, and the loose end hung over the branch of a tree.

"Now," said Keeler, "if you have any prayers to say, they will fit in well right here."

"That's a matter between me and Oneyou don't know," said the scout, still calmly.

"You pull your ear and I'll pull mine."

"We pull 'rope here," sniered the guerrilla.

"Then, pull away."

The words were spoken calmly, rather than boastfully, but they stung Keeler, and he gave the signal.

The men at the rope pulled sharply, and Sharpshot was pulled up and hung dangling in mid-air.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MARCH OF THE GUARD.

Barlow led his men at once to the Union camp. The men on the bank were busily gressing at all hours, but the end was near, and the leaders hoped to cross the following day. As the scouting party came in, they passed impromptu woodmen hauling logs, and every one seemed busy.

Max looked for Zagonyi, but, failing to find him, went at once to Fremont.

The great explorer and soldier was at his bhabu quarters, and with him, in close conference, were Sigel and Zagonyi.

"Ahl! Sergeant Barlow, is it you?" said the Pathfinder, looking up. "Major Zagonyi was just saying that it was time for you to return."

"There has been fighting, general—"

"And by my—boys—the guard—how did they acquit themselves?" Zagonyi quickly asked.

"Nobly, major. They have gone through many dangers successfully; and, while they have not lost a man, the enemy will be mired over a mile in rollin' water."

"Boys, fellows—brave fellows! Did I not tell you so? General Fremont. And not a man killed? Good—good! But, sergeant, they surely had wounded?"

The Hungarian spoke anxiously.

"Two-thirds, at least, can show cuts and bullet marks, but no one will be incapacitated from duty a single day. We cut our way through twice our number, and the guard dashed back the foar as a rock scorns the way."

Barlow had dropped into bombastic language unconsciously, but it was done because he knew that Zagonyi's whole heart was with the guard.

"Brave men—brave men!" commented the major.

"I am proud of you, and of the guard," said Fremont, "but the result does not surprise me. I know the material of which that band is made."

"They are like the 'Old Guard,'" said Zagonyi, looking at the Pathfinder, "and they never forgot that they have their Napoleon."

"Don't flatter me, major; I warn you, do not do it," said Fremont, good-naturedly; then, turning to Barlow: "We will hear your report, sergeant."

Barlow gave a brief account of all that had happened, though reserving an account of his fight with Yeaton for a more favorable time. He also explained the latest position of the guerrilla.

"Ah!" said the Pathfinder, "I think we have a chance to strike them in turn."

"Let me at them!" said Zagonyi, quickly. "I will take the guard and scatter their whole force."

"So be it, major; take what men you wish, and report to me on your return."

The Hungarian motioned to Barlow, and they departed together. Several minutes of activity followed, and then the guard, to the number of one hundred, was ready to march.

Zagonyi would have laughed at the idea of more being required.

The start was made, and they swam the Osage below the bridge.

Beyond that point they hardly knew where to go. Max hoped every moment to see Sharpshot, for he had promised to meet them on the way, but existing doubt as to whether the events the guerrillas would actually make, had prevented any definite understanding.

The reader, however, knows that the sharpshooter was not in condition to keep his promise.

The night was dark, but the prophets among the guard expressed the opinion that the clouds would soon break away, and, when the moon arose, the weather and the night would be fine.

Having no better plan in view, they rode

toward where Barlow had last seen the enemy.

Zagonyi rode at the front, with Lieutenant Majthenyi like Zagonyi, an historical character on his right, and Barlow on his left, and behind them came the guard.

A fine body of men had never crossed the soil of Missouri. In form and face they were thoroughly manly, and in training they were all soldier. Minor matters were left behind when the Pathfinder's guard donned Union blue.

Not far did they go in this compact order, however, for Zagonyi had no intention of running into an ambush, so half a dozen scouts were sent out to examine the ground in advance. Barlow asked for and received permission to make one of this squad.

Before they reached the place where Barlow's men had crossed the Osage under fire, one of the scouts fell back and reported that the guerrillas were encamped in a wood at the southwest, so away in that direction went the guard.

The scouts searched the wood cautiously, though it was long, and the enemy were said to be at the further end. The policy of a good soldier is to be extremely careful when care is needed; and when the time for action comes, to go in with every nerve strained for effect; and Zagonyi was a master of the art of war.

Entering the trees, the major threw five men forward on foot to feel the way, and the remainder followed as silently as possible in the rear.

Barlow was one of the scouts, and, as he crept through the bushes, he put into use all the ways he had learned during his career among the Indians, and his progress was remarkably skillful and noiseless.

As had been prophesied, the clouds were breaking away, and the newly-risen moon shone brightly at times. Its light, however, was fickle and uncertain, as dark clouds ever and anon crossed its face.

Still it helped the scouts on their way.

Barlow had gone a mile without seeing a sign of any person, foe or friend, when he experienced one of the most singular adventures of his life.

He had reached a place where there was a break in the trees, forming a little glade, and, as the moon shone brightly within, he paused at the edge of the bushes to look ahead before thus exposing himself.

Then it was that he saw a strange and startling sight.

At first he drew his revolver, for he believed that a man—a Confederate—was before him, but he did not raise the hammer. Instead, he stood like one paralyzed.

The object before him was a tall statue, and, though it was formed like a man in every way, there was a deathly pallor about the face, which was starting; and in that face, so like the dead, he recognized the features of Edgar Peterson!

Ay, the resemblance was perfect. In every way the strange object was like that unfortunate man, as he had appeared before Sam Styles led his lynchers against him; all was natural except the death-like pallor.

Barlow stood dumb with amazement and momentary terror. He had never seen a human in gray, but at that moment was unable to tell that the dead did sometimes come back. Edgar Peterson was buried; he had been for two months numbered with those who had crossed the mystic river; but here was his form, his face, all—in spirit shape.

To add to the terror of the situation, the eyes of the specter were fixed upon him with a steady stare; and, as the sergeant gazed, the creature put up one hand and made a motion as though to warn him back.

Just then a dense cloud swept across the face of the moon, and the glade was plunged into darkness.

Perhaps a full minute elapsed before the light again came, and during that interval Barlow was recovering his scattered senses. Whatever the object was, he must advance upon it.

The cloud passed on, the light came again, but when Barlow looked the glade was vacant.

The specter had vanished!

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SURPRISE.

On the heels of this last discovery came a rebellious feeling from the sergeant. A thoroughly practical man, he had never believed in anything supernatural, and with the fact that the object had gone, came a conviction that it had been no phantom, but a creature of flesh and blood.

Reckless of consequences, he broke from

cover, rushed across the glade, and entered the bushes at the further side. He glanced keenly about, but there was no sign of any one, human or otherwise.

He searched thoroughly for several minutes, alarmed lest he had seen one of the guerrillas, and allowed him to escape, but failing to find anything, went back to the glade and paused to reflect.

What had he seen?

It was a hard question to answer, but as he remembered the face of the object, and how distinctly he had seen it, he grew more and more amazed.

Either the creature had possessed a remarkable likeness to Edgar Peterson, or else it was that man himself, in bodily condition or as a spirit. Which was it?

Bearing on the last question came a recollection of the deathly face and fixed stare of the creature and for the first time in his life, Max Barlow began to feel a belief in the supernatural.

He was sure that he had seen Edgar Peterson, and as he was said to be dead and buried, it followed that this had been his specter; and a reason for the appearance was to be found in the fact that it had made a motion to warn him back.

Had Edgar Peterson, because of their friendship in life, arisen from the spirit world to tell him that danger too great to be dared lay in advance?

So Barlow believed at that moment, but the warning, if one it was, fell on barren soil. The sergeant was brave and patriotic, he had a duty to perform; and in the danger in the world could not alarm him.

"I will go on and think of this anon," he muttered.

He did as he had said, and pushed forward through the bushes, though he had lost so much time that he did not expect to be the one to carry news to Zagonyi.

In this he reasoned rightly. Other scouts had gone faster than he, and as the guard marched slowly on in the wood, these men soon brought him information as to the exact position of the guerrillas.

Preparations were made for a charge through their camp. Had the wood been smaller, the major would have tried to hem them in by surrounding the place, but under the circumstances, this would be foolish.

He must trust to a dash, fight while the enemy had the task of watching him he could, and note the result at the end.

As has before been said, Keeler must either have been mad or foolish to camp as he had done. He had aroused the temper of the Unionists, and, since he was so near their lines, he should have known that he was running great risk to sit idly down; but more noted military men than he have made blunders equally grave.

Zagonyi led his men on carefully. They moved slowly, for horses at a rapid pace make too much noise for secret work, and, as he moved them, he noted that the Union camp was a place where the trees grew so sparsely that grass had sprung up on the ground; and this made a carpet for the feet of the horses, and prevented noise.

At last, they had gone so near the camp that secrecy was no longer possible. Zagonyi arranged his men, and they only awaited the word to dash forward.

Barlow, though still confused, was doing his best to center his thoughts on the work before them, and, as he had been given command of the left wing, there was need of coolness.

Zagonyi had the center and Lieutenant Majthenyi the right.

At last the word crept along the line, and the guard started.

They had spoken sharply to their horses, and no more was needed. The gallant animals sprang forward, and with a crash the boys in blue moved toward the camp.

They had not gone over three rods before the alarm was given. Two of the guerrillas picked up their guns, and then, as the guard swept along, dashed into the surprised camp.

Confusion seized upon the Confederates; they were about to pay the penalty of their recklessness, and, at last, too, against a foe who had no weak points.

Up to the time, the Unionists had seen nothing of Sharpshot, but as they crushed forward the scout suddenly appeared at the front.

"Forward, you fiery, untamed critters, forward!" he shouted, swinging his rifle about his head. "Rush in, an' the day is your'n, for sure."

Then he turned and sped along at the front, on foot, but as cool as ever.

At that time, the members of the guard did not know that he had lately been suspended by a rope, so his sudden appearance was not in the least remarkable to them.

The Unionists struck heavily, and their foes were in no condition to receive the shock. Most of them, however, with the backs of their horses, and hearing Keeler's order to stand firm, were reluctantly facing the guard; others, still on foot, had paused with their weapons ready; others still were rushing about in wild confusion, and the fourth division was making the best of its way from the spot.

With this dilapidated force Keeler hoped to successfully oppose the Pathfinder's guard. The guerrillas was brave enough, and he had no thought of flight, so, with orders clearly given, he grimly set his face to the foe.

The shock came, and, like a resistless hurricane, the Unionists swept through the guard. The opposition was feeble. Men were in the way, men who were brave and ready to fight, but what force could present a decent front under such circumstances?

With swinging blows from their sabers the guard swept through. They left dead and down-trodden men behind them, but they were all wearers of gray. Scarcely a return blow had been struck.

Utter terror seized upon the guerrillas. They knew there was no chance for them to fight under such circumstances, and, as it seemed as they were, they could only expect to be cut down if they remained to fight.

Others joined in the wild flight of those who had first fled, and Keeler's voice fell on unheeding ears. He was trying desperately to stem the tide, but just then a stalwart Unionist attacked him, knocked his sword from his hand, and would have secured a prisoner then and there, had not the rush of other men separated them.

Then the chief saw the guard turn about, saw his own men fling down their weapons and realize that the day was lost. He sprang to his feet, applied the spurs and dashed away, saving himself by luck and the aid of the darkness.

The triumph of the guard was complete. One half of the guerrillas had surrendered, and the rest were in disorderly flight; the band had been completely broken up, and this, too, without the loss of a man on the Union side.

A portion of the victors, under Lieutenant Majthenyi, pursued for a short distance, but they had no desire to run into a trap, and, after a short flight, they returned to the scene of the surprise.

Zagonyi had brought order out of confusion. His men were in perfect form, and the prisoners were ready for the march to the Union camp. Nothing remained to be done except to go, and they went accordingly.

Sharpshot fell into line beside Barlow.

"A good ending to the day's sport, sergeant," he said.

"I think Keeler's band is pretty well broken," said Max, exultantly.

"Reckon it is, for sure. It'll be a scant force that answers at roll-call to-morrow. If Keeler's not such a plucky critter, I should say very likely he would never lead again raim."

"But he will. He can find plenty of vagabonds who will not attach themselves to a regular army, and with these he will soon be in the field again."

"I had a little adventure ter-night, sergeant," said the scout, abruptly.

"Did you? How was that?"

Sharpshot told the story of his hanging experience, and, from the point of interest, we will use his own words.

"Yes, sir, I did. I got ready ter string me up. I heard a voice whisper in my ear sayin' as how he wan't so bad as he seemed, that he was a Union spy in disguise, an' that he would try ter help me out. So, sergeant, he got charge o' the rope busiess, an' I'll be shot off, arter the noose was put around my neck, he didn't take it off an' hitch it around my shoulders instead."

"Didn't the guerrillas see him?" Barlow asked, in surprise.

"They seed him fumblin' about me, but they thought it all right, an' it was so them devils that them guerrillas got the chancin'."

"You may call the fact pure luck, then."

"Luck and providence, sergeant, the same which has befriended me more nor onst in the past, but it was the darkness that fooled the guerrillas."

"Well, but how did it end?"

"I stood that, mute as a mouse, with the noose about my shoulders, when Keeler give me the word, then up I went in mid-air. Of

course the strain was not great, but I had a part to play, an' I played death to save my life to the best o' my ability, now you bet. I struggled as I thought a hangin' man naturally would, first desperately and then easily, lettin' up gradually until I hung with only a jerking of my heels an' a quiver o' my body."

"It was a terrible test of nerve," said Barlow, shuddering.

"You can swear ter that right along. I've been in many a tight place, but never one that required so much nerve as that. But I did it, sergeant, an' I think I did it well. At any rate I fooled the critters, an' I hung there, nice an' easy. Keeler hadn't a suspicion what I was hung by the neck until I was dead."

"And what came then?"

"He ordered me to cut down, Keeler did, an' again my friend pushed himself forward. He cut the rope, felt o' my heart, said it had ceased to beat, an' no one appeared ter dispute him. Keeler ordered the 'body,' as he called me, ter be dragged away in the bushes, an' my friend said to that, cut my hands loose an' left me alone.

"They had dragged me heels first, but I never made a sign, an' when they left me alone in the bushes I was as satisfied as though they had left me."

"You didn't stay there long, I suppose?"

"You bet I didn't. I only waited a bit, an' then I arose, scooted out an' jined your critters as they come down."

"And your rescuer?"

"I don't know anything about him, but he is the boy I took him ter be, he has cared for number one. I think it was—"

Sharpshot ended by pronouncing the name of a spy well known to Fremont's army.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ACROSS THE OSAGE.

The guard reached the Union camp in safety, swimming the river below the bridge-builders, and taking their prisoners into camp. Zagonyi reported to General Fremont, some further work was done, and then the tired soldiers sought their blankets.

It was near morning before Max Barlow fell asleep. He had just gone through such a series of adventures that he had food enough for thought, but his mind dwelt mostly on the strange sight he had seen in the wood.

Had it been a specter?

Again and again he asked himself the question, but there was no satisfactory answer to the riddle. He found it hard, with his firm and practical mind, to believe that such things could be, but the subject was one which troubled him in every way.

There were three ways to look at the matter. Either he had seen Edgar Peterson in the flesh or his spirit, or else it had been a man who greatly resembled his old friend. Keeler had said that Edgar was dead and buried, but the guerrilla was not a man of strict veracity.

He might have lied, and Edgar might still be living, but if so, why his face so strangely pale? More like a ghost than anything else in the object he peered at.

If it had been a person, it strongly resembled Edgar, who was it, and how had he so mysteriously disappeared?"

With all these questions rushing through his mind, Barlow lay awake until nearly morning and rolled and tossed on his blanket.

The following day the bridge was to be completed, the Osage passed, and the march resumption. Keeler had been vexatious, but it was one of the fortunes of war, and not to be avoided.

So, after Barlow turned out, he chanced upon Sharpshot and a man he knew to be the favorite spy of the army. It was his name the sharpshooter had pronounced on the previous night, and Max joined them, anxious to see if his suspicion had been correct.

It was Sharpshot had thought. The spy with the daring peculiar to his class, had entered the Confederate camp, and, in the darkness, mixed with them, unsuspected. Fate had brought him and Sharpshot there at the same time, and by the use of great skill and bravery, he had succeeded in saving the life of the sharpshooter.

Barlow and Sharpshot wandered on together.

"Do you believe in ghosts?" Max suddenly asked.

It was a question which would have given him a slight start, but the scout met it coolly.

"Sartinly," he answered.

"And you have seen them?"

"Three or four times. Ob? they are a thing of fact, sergeant; no doubt about that, Seed one yourself?"

"No, but I didn't know but what I should, such strange things are occurring just now."

And then Barlow changed the subject, and their whole attention was given to the bridge as they arrived.

One word and never, dwelt on his late encounter with annoying perseverance. He could not solve the mystery. He would have been glad to believe Edgar Peterson alive, but, if it was so, why did he not show himself to one who would have been his friend then, as in the past?

Barlow reflected on the subject until he was tired and angry; and it was a great relief when the bridge was finished, and the other came for an audience.

The guard, combed, more than thirty thousand strong, and carrying over eighty heavy guns, and away they went on their mission of war—their destination being Springfield, by way of Bolivar.

Not to dwell on the events of this march which are not of importance to our story, let us go forward to an incident which occurred just as the army was nearing the Pomme de Terre River.

A sound returned to camp at noon, and, finding it was Keeler, he let him into camp.

"What is this?" Max asked, in surprise.

"I came upon a man a mile south of here, and he gave me that paper and asked me to deliver it to you. That's all I know about it."

The sergeant broke the seal, unfolded the paper, and saw writing in a bold, masculine hand.

He read the contents rapidly.

"MAX BARLOW—If you can get away from your post, it is my desire that you go to Springfield, in disguise. Olive and Lena Somers have been stolen from their homes. You can guess the author of the letter, and I am sure you will be able to guess the guard who sent him; but I suspect that night he has collected another force of guerrillas. His band is now a powerful force in the Ozarks, and General Price is disgusted with him. The Somers sisters have been stolen—one for him, the other for Sam Stiles; and I am sure he will not let them go. I am sending you to Springfield. I am going there myself, and if I can aid them I will. Such men as Keeler bring disgrace on the country, and I will have them punished. FASTER."

So ran the letter, and though Barlow afterward thought of the noble nature of the man who had written, he could just then think only of the peril which menaced the woman he loved.

Olive Somers in the power of Keeler! Good heavens! the knowledge was maddening. She with her terrible, commanding nature! She with whom honor was unknown.

Barlow was almost wild. Only one thought was in his mind—to secure leave of absence and then hasten to Springfield. It must be done—he must go to the rescue of the woman he loved. All thoughts of the glory of the battlefield which he would lose were then gone—he thought only of Olive.

He was about to go to Zagonyi when he was summoned to that officer. He went and heard news which electrified him.

The guard had been ordered to march on Springfield.

At that place was a considerable force of Confederates, and the Pathfinder general had resolved to send a cavalry force composed of the guard and Major White's "Prairie Scouts" to reconnoiter, and if they thought safe, to attempt the capture of the town.

Such was the welcome news which met Max Barlow as he reported at Zagonyi's quarters.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE PRISONERS.

Leaving Zagonyi and the guard to make up the remaining march to Springfield, let us go on ahead and look after the fortunes of those, who, if Barlow's information was correct, were in a bad situation—Olive and Lena Somers.

The friendly Confederate had spoken truly when he said they had been stolen by Keeler. Mr. Somers, though considered a man of good common sense in other respects, had persisted in remaining at the village in the face of all the warnings he had received, and the already abundant proof that Keeler had designs against the peace of his country.

It was well that was not Barlow and others had feared. After Keeler had been frustrated in his first attempts, he swept through the Ozark country and along the Osage until so severely handled by Zagonyi; then he gathered the survivors of his band, added

some new recruits, and one night descended on the village and kidnaped the girls.

Mr. Somers was left at the house with a wound which bade fair to keep him in the repair-shop for at least a month, which would give him time to consider whether he had acted wisely.

Having secured the girls, Keeler headed straight for Springfield, where he arrived the following morning. He made no conversation with his prisoners on the way, but explanations were not needed to show the girls that they were in extreme peril.

They were taken to a house near the center of the place and given in charge of a man and his wife who seemed fit tools for Keeler.

To that house, an hour later, the guerrilla chief came, accompanied by Sam Stiles.

Olive and Lena were surprised to see the two together, for the chief, despite his villainy, was a man of education and fair extraction, and the wife was a beauty. They had known him well at their native village, had never liked him, and, since he led the lynchers against Edgar Peterson, their feelings were of a type which can easily be imagined.

Keeler bowed before them with grave politeness, which showed his skill in grim irony.

"I trust, ladies, that you are enjoying yourselves in your new home," he said.

"We are not, and we would like an explanation," Olive said, quickly.

"I trust you already know that you are my prisoners, so I need not state that fact. The reason is next in order, and that may be quickly given. I am human, Miss Somers; I have seen and admired you, and it is my ambition to make you my wife. It was for that purpose that I brought you here."

Olive grew very pale and lost her composure for a moment. Lena, equally disturbed, turned her head away from the burning regard of Sam Stiles.

"The idea does not seem to please you," added Keeler, in the same bland manner.

"It does not, sir," Olive plainly said.

"And why not?"

"Because, sir, I have no desire to become your wife."

"I had an idea the wind would blow that way," said the guerrilla, yawning with assumed laziness. "That's why I stole you. Deuce take it! I didn't get enough sleep last night. Too much hard work in this business."

"Do you mean in the stealing of women?" retorted Olive.

"Well, that comes in as a part of my trade."

"I thought as much, sir. I have heard that you are really an outlaw; that the Confederate generals refuse to recognize you as a soldier, and that they deplore the fact that such men exist in Missouri."

Olive spoke with cutting bitterness; but Keeler remained unmoved.

"You are a sensible girl what you hear. When General Price finds himself hemmed in, Springfield by the Union army, he will be glad to extend his right hand and let the tiger of the Ozarks strike in his behalf. But we are wandering from our subject. Do you know why my friend, Stiles, appears in this case?"

"No."

"Because he, too, is in the field as a lover. He has felt the burning passion, and his heart is ridged like a sieve. He has been like a schoolboy for several weeks, has written poetry, and sung songs to the moon. He goes about in deep thought, and has lost a good deal of flesh. All for love! And, ladies, the object of his affection is Miss Lena Somers. Ain't that so, Sam?"

"That's the identical idea, cap'n," replied the ruffian, with a grin.

"It was sport for them to torture and frighten these innocent and helpless girls, for they felt that the game was all in their own hands, but the pleasure was all on one side."

Poor Lena turned terribly pale as she heard Keeler's declaration. She lacked the outspoken bravery of her elder sister, and, though possessed of a good deal of latent courage, had not the nerve to hear such an assertion calmly.

"And what girl could have?"

"Sir," said Olive, with spirit, "why will you persist in insulting us?"

"Bless me," said the unmoved villain, in assumed surprise. "I never looked at it in that light. Where does the insult come in? I fail to see. It can't lie in the fact that two worthy young men are sighing and wooring

at your feet. Look at us. Won't we make loyal and noble brothers-in-law?"

He waved his hand dramatically at his grinning ally, and the girls were driven to desperation. Their hearts were like lead, and they could no longer retain their calmness. "For heaven's sake," said Lena, faintly, "go away!"

"What, so soon? And our wooing has only begun! Fair Lena, I am surprised. Such coldness is not due, so far as time is concerned, until at least three months after marriage."

"I mean Keebler," said Olive, "do you call yourself a gentleman to use such words toward ladies?"

"Perhaps I am on the wrong track," he acknowledged, "and as time is precious with me, I will only pause to say that we are in full earnest in this. Sam and I are tired of single life, so we are going to marry you. We expect some opposition at first, but you will fall into line after due reflection, for in these troublous times every woman needs a protector."

"So I receive," said Olive.

"Sarcastic, still; but never mind. We can bear it. We are going now, but I trust that due reflection will show you the way of wisdom."

"Yes, an' don't you let yer mind run on Edgar Peterson," added Stiles, addressing Lena.

"Silence, you idiot!" growled the chief. And then they said good-by and went away.

The sisters were left alone with their trouble, but they knew at last just what to expect. Keebler had shown his hand, and they knew he had the will to carry out his plans.

"What shall we do?" Lena asked, turning for advice and encouragement to her strong-minded sister.

"We must in some way get word to General Price," was Olive's decided answer. "If we do that, we are saved. He is a soldier, and such men will never see women persecuted. It is well known that he does not countenance the acts of Keebler, and I suspect he would be glad to have a case pressed so that he could deprive him of his command. The Southern Confederacy is not an upholder of wanton cruelty and depredation."

"But we have no way to get word to him."

"We must find a way."

"The people of the house cannot be moved, and we are kept apart from every one else."

Lena glanced about her as she spoke. They were in a room which had but one door and that was locked, while the single window was boarded on the inside, and provided with heavy blinds on the outer side. A small lamp lighted the place and the furniture was simple and plain.

"I repeat, we must find a way," said Olive.

"The Union army is marching on Springfield."

"Yes, and the brave Pathfinder will reach here; but our enemy will take us and fice before they arrive. We must aid ourselves. I wish that Max Barlow knew of our situation."

"You are proud of him, Olive."

"I am, Lena, and I expect to see the Pathfinder's body-guard accomplish wonders. Lena, sister, I wish it was as well with you. Edgar Peterson."

Lena sent out her hand.

"Don't, Olive! Time will avenge the injustice done Edgar, and, sooner or later, men will be glad to put a lofty monument over his grave. I know it!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE MARCH OF THE GUARD.

When the Pathfinder's guard left the army and started for Springfield, much was left to the discretion of Zagonyi.

General Fremont, however, informed that the town would be held by between three and four hundred Confederate, and his directions were for the guard to reconnoiter the place while, if the leader considered it advisable, he might attempt the capture of the whole.

And so the guard started on an expedition which was to win for them great glory and give their names a place in the history of the United States as long as the republic exists.*

Few words were spoken by those warlike men which were not necessary, but it is probable that, in the mind of each, was running one thought. Men had been had

who had sneered at them and their purpose, who had said that the Pathfinder's guard was but a romantic idea, and the men fit for parade and show.

At last, though they had proved their courage in minor conflicts, they were going forward to strike their first real blow for the cause they upheld, and in every man's mind was a settled purpose to show the world of what material they were made.

It was a grand looking body of men as they rode, every one so handsomely proportioned and, though but a hundred and fifty men, in every way to be considered brave for that would have faced them after one good look at their physique and outfit.

Divided into three companies, these were led by Captains Newhall, Westerborg and Foley, and among others who followed were Lieutenant Mattheyni, Zagonyi's adjutant, and Sergeant Barlow.

If the reader fails to find the latter's name on the list of participants in the expedition, it will be understood that we are covering a real character under a fictitious name. This, at least, is the name most frequently used.

With the guard went another famous cavalry troop, of which we have before made mention. This was Major White's company, called the "Prairie Scouts."

United, they numbered upward of three hundred men—all gallant a force as ever trod the soil of Missouri.

They made good progress, but, to Barlow, they seemed to creep. He remembered the note he had received in regard to Olive Somers and her sister, and, to save his life, he could not fix his mind on the work before him.

Well, perhaps it was for the guard, that the unhappy sergeant was not their leader that day; but where is the man who can wonder at his feelings?

Sharpshot rode with the guard for ten miles, then, after a few words with Zagonyi, he gave his horse the spur and dashed on ahead.

The night was cold, and, hardy as the men were, they shivered occasionally as they rode. Not one had an overcoat, and when a slight rain descended, officers and men had to hold their hats over their heads in a murmur, and went on as fast as convenient.

Springfield lies well among the Ozark Mountains, but the troopers made use of the Boarhill road when possible, and in this way approached the town.

Barlow was anxious for service, and deep down in his heart he registered a vow that if he again set eyes on Keebler, one of them would never come out of the combat alive. He still rode the horse he had so strangely acquired from the guerrilla, and he hoped to ride the noble animal when fighting his master.

Forty-five miles lay between the Pomme de Terre and Springfield, and night passed away while the band was still on the road.

Sharpshot had not gone away without an object. He had gone in advance to look the town over and give Zagonyi points, and as it was necessary to hear from him before venturing too near, their pace was at last moderated to a degree that nearly drove Barlow wild.

A little past noon, word was received from a Union man that the Confederates were in no condition to hold the town against such a force, so nothing against it, but this instead of pleasing the guard served to disappoint them. They wanted a fight, a hard one, where one side or the other would win glory.

They went on. Zagonyi was afraid the enemy would run and slip through his fingers, so he left the "Prairie Scouts," and with his own command crossed over to the Mount Vernon road where he would be in the Confederate rear.

While executing this maneuver, Sharpshot made his appearance.

"How many?" Zagonyi quietly asked. "They count above two thousand."

The Hungarian looked surprised.

"All things are possible," he said, "but are you sure of this? Four or five hundred is what we have heard."

"They've been reinforced by fifteen hundred more, nigh about half' of which is cavalry. There are some guerrillas, too, I tell you, and they lookin' formidable."

The scout spoke earnestly. It was not his place to advise, unless invited, but he believed the enemy too strong to be attacked, and knowing the mettle of Zagonyi and his

guard he feared they would do something rash. Consequently, he wished to impress the major with an idea of what was before them.

"Two thousand—and we are one hundred and fifty!"

Zagonyi spoke thoughtfully and looked in the direction of the Bolivar road. Somewhere there, Major White and his "Prairie Scouts" were moving, and the Hungarian wished all were together then.

"Two thousand," said Sharpshot, "an' all ablebze with weapons and gewgaws. They are armed to the teeth, an' I reckon Fremont won't find it easy ter clear Springfield."

Cunning words he spoke, but Zagonyi did not seem to hear them. He sat still on his horse and looked steadily at vacancy. Once his lips moved, and Sharpshot caught the words:

"Two thousand!"

It was a fateful pause in the history of the guard. Every man was looking at Zagonyi. It had been their ambition to capture Springfield, and it was hard to turn back. Two thousand men, however, were very different from four hundred. The odds were terrible.

Still Zagonyi deliberated. What passed in his mind, for and against each plan, is best known to himself; but Barlow, spurred on by thoughts of Olive, and the knowledge that the reputation of the guard was at stake, had a wild hope in his mind.

At last the leader turned to his men.

"Soldiers," he said, "we are in front of our first real enemy. We have now to decide whether we advance or retreat. If we advance, we are in for a fight. There are two thousand and we one hundred and fifty. In spite of all, I now ask you to go forward. If it is for us to make the future reputation of the guard. Men have said that we are but pale soldiers, but if you will follow me we will achieve a victory. Shall we advance?"

A shout arose from the men. Every eye was glistening—all were eager to strike for their good name, for Fremont and the Union.

"I do not ask any man to go who does not wish to. If any one is sick, or fatigued by marching, let him step forward and I will excuse him."

Not a man moved. All were worn out by marching, but not one was willing to turn back.

The eyes of Zagonyi glistened in turn. He was a veteran, used to war and its terrors; but these young soldiers were all men, who, a few months before, had not had a thought of such work. He had learned to love the body-guard, one and all, and to think them of rare excellency; and now, as the proof came, it was the proudest moment of his life.

"Lead us to the enemy!" said one, and all echoed the request.

"There will be hard fighting, for they are many in number; but if you will keep together and look to me, and do as I expect you to do, we will teach them to remember the boy guard."

Another shout, and Zagonyi was satisfied. All were ready; all were anxious for the venture; but in all the command there was not one coward.

But think of the odds! One hundred and fifty men against over two thousand! If a novelist, out of the resources of his own inventive power, wrote of such a thing he would be denounced as having outstepped the bounds of reason. To verify what we write, let the reader turn to the pages of his history.

Zagonyi said little more. He placed the guard once more in motion, and they moved on at a trot.

Sharpshot fell back to Barlow's side.

"I'm comin'!" he said, "these brave critters undoubtedly are goin' ter their death."

"Some of them are, I have no doubt," Barlow answered.

"It is not well to sacrifice such lives."

"Say nothing on that score," for you are as brave as any here. To-day, the guard either clears its name from traducers, or yields up the ghost in front of the foe. If we fall, it shall be with our faces to the town. Say no more."

"They are sons of Missouri!" said the scout, lifting his old cap.

Not at all. Illinois, Kentucky, Ohio, Iowa—these and other States are represented; but we are one in our devotion to the Union, and we are Fremont's body guard!"

Max spoke proudly, and Sharpshot dashed his hand across his eyes. Brave himself, he

*A full account of the guard may be found in Mr. General Fremont's little volume, "The Story of the Guard."

felt his heart throb in unison with these gallant fellows.

"You are here," Barlow added, "Why don't you turn back while you can?"

"Ten hundred hoses couldn't drag me back," said the scout fiercely. "I will go on and conquer, or die with the guard!"

Barlow looked at him long and earnestly. Perhaps he was thinking that, not being of the party, he might be allowed to go on and sacrifice his life; but no more words were spoken for several minutes.

Then Sharpshot broke the silence.

"I think, sergeant," said he, "that I have an idea where the girls are hid. If we once get inside Springfield, I'll try ter lead you for them."

"I fear that Keeler will take them and flee at the first opportunity," answered Barlow, gloomily.

"I hope succeed, that is to say that the enemy will go so quick that that won't be time, au' you an' me will hev our eyes open for this thing. I'm with you in the business, an' seem as how Keeler once did me the honor of hangin' me, I shall be glad to get one or two good raps at him in return."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE CHARGE.

The guard went on at a quick trot. Not much further did they have to go to reach Springfield, and they wished to move quickly and take the enemy by surprise, if possible. When this is done, a small force will often put a much larger one to flight.

According to the observations made by Sharpshot, the Confederates should be in the center of the town, but the sequel proved that enough time had been given them to allow them to come out and meet the guard on ground more disadvantageous to Zagonyi's brawes.

The latter emerged from a wood, and saw before them a scene which would have dealt terror to hearts less brave.

A few hundred yards away, another wood faced them. In front of this second wood was a hill; and, in front of the hill, a hollow through which ran a mity brook.

Upon the hill, the ground could scarcely be seen because of the Confederates that were there.

The enemy's infantry was awaiting there to the number of twelve or thirteen hundred, while, a little to one side, four hundred troopers were seen.

And this army was drawn up in battle array to meet and crush the little handful of Confederates they had come in such force, when half a dozen men had havesed out to make victory certain, is not clear; but it may be they had a suspicion of the mettle of the guard.

"Can you go ter Olive through them?" Sharpshot whispered in Barlow's ear.

"Through a million of them, if need be," was the answer, quickly given.

"Many a man will never go through alive. See! we must charge through that narrow lane across the creek an' up the hill. At the creek, too, we'll have to dash through that rail fence. No hoss can jump it, an' while we work, the infantry will pour down the bullets on us. Then, ef any on us do go through, there's the four hundred cavalry here to fall on our shattered ranks."

The scout spoke with perfect coolness, and it was evident that, though seeing all the dangers, he was not alarmed.

"We'll be all shattered; we must not," said Barlow fiercely. "We must carry and clear the town."

Zagonyi turned to his men.

"Comrades!" he said, "when I recruited you, I said the body-guard was not for parade but for war. The enemy is before us, two thousand strong, and we are but one hundred and fifty. It is possible not one of us will come back, and if any soldier here thinks the enemy too many, he need not go. Who turns?"

Not one of the guard moved. All sat steadily in their places, their faces to the enemy, their lips compressed, the signs of a settled purpose on their grand faces. They were of heroic mold, and where Zagonyi led all were ready to follow.

A look of joy passed over the leader's face. As well as he thought of the guard, he knew it was not human nature for young soldiers to be so brave, and their calm heroism tickled him through and through.

He had been sufficiently answered.

"We will go on," he continued, "and let your battle-cry be, 'Fremont and the Union!' Watch me well, and listen for orders, and we will teach the enemy to re-

member the body-guard. Draw sabers! By the right flank—quick trot—march!"

At the word they started, a small but steady mass of Union blue, the guardians of the old flag. They were starting on a charge which has a parallel only in that of Napoleon's "guard."

Down the lane they went, straight for the brook and the opposing fence, two hundred yards away, but not many rods had been covered when all along the lane, shots began to come from hidden marksmen, and soldiers and horses dropped by the way.

The real toe was well beyond, and yet, the destruction was already beginning. Zagonyi looked back. His braves were riding with the coolness of veterans.

Amid this fire they passed the two hundred yards, and crossed the brook. Bullets came like hailstones. One passed through the shoulder of a cap, and another cut a furrow along Barlow's arm. Still, it would not do pause for these hidden sharpshooters; the real enemy must be reached and attacked.

They crossed the brook and reached the fence. It could not be leaped, and officers and men were alike eager to aid in removing it. Lieutenant Majthényi east aside a rail, and willing hands soon made a breach.

All this while the fire was under fire. Fire-arms of various kinds were crackling on every side; it was a terrible baptism of fire, and, to many, a fatal one.

At last the fence was down, and the way was open for the real charge; but in the lane behind were dead men and dead horses. Out of the hundred and fifty, forty were unable to participate in the dash. Of these, all were not dead—the loss was chiefly in fallen horses.

The orders of Zagonyi rang out clearly, and the survivors formed. Their battle-cry sounded, and they started up the hill to meet the waiting enemy.

Almost unconsciously, Barlow glanced at his companions. Their faces were stern and resolute, their lips compressed and their eyes gleaming. In spite of their losses, in spite of what was before them, they longed for close quarters.

Up and on they went, their sabers gleaming in the sun as they charged their shields out on the air in their startling clearness. Zagonyi afterward said that their battle-cry sounded like thunder.

The most critical moment of all in the history of the guard was at hand. They were going to victory or certain death. For them, there could be no retreat. If they showed their backs to the enemy, few, if any, as they were, their fate was sealed.

It needed a mad and hopeless venture—what could that one hundred and ten, brave as they were, do against two thousand?

We will see.

Up the hill they went at full speed, their shouts pealing forth as never those of "parade soldiers" had done, their front terribly ominous, few as they were; but the enemy must have laughed among themselves. Surely, these were but madmen coming to them.

A bullet passed between Barlow's side and a hoss, a man fell dead beside him, the fire was terribly hot; but he only gripped his saber the tighter and went on with the rest. He glanced at Sharpshot—the man was as cool as any one could be, but there was a look on his face like that of a hungry man.

Zagonyi was never so happy. He looked like one going to a grand reception. And so went in triumph, though death and destruction lay in their path. He bravely felt like a victor. The guard was following closely, the men he loved so well—the Pathfinder's band would make themselves a name or yield up the ghost on honor's field.

"Fremont and the Union!"

How gallant looked the men who uttered it! They were forming a grand chapter in history.

Their sabers bristled with Confederates. The twelve hundred Confederates—all were awaiting their arrival, confident that they would be absorbed at one motion.

The hill was climbed, the intervening distance shortened—the guard hurled themselves on the foe!

Max Barlow grasped his sword tightly and plunged into the affray. A soldier reached out his hand to seize the horse by the rein and dash the man's skull. Then, striking right and left, the sergeant went on.

"Fremont and the Union!"

How the cry rang on the air, arising above all other sounds and thrilling those who uttered it. They uttered two names which

were dearer to them than their lives—for those two they risked the last.

It is impossible to describe the battle. That little compact body of men seemed almost to disappear as they struck the overwhelming odds of the Confederates, but they were there and fighting gloriously. Their sabers were red with blood, their faces black with smoke and dust, but still they pressed forward.

The enemy could not stand before them. They were driven and were sharply hill. Dead and wounded covered the hill, but nearly all wore Confederate gray. The guard cut down everything that opposed them.

Barlow saw Sharpshot fighting with clubbed rifle. Not a word passed the scout's lips, but his work was terrible. He struck, crushing blows, recovered and struck again. He was driving them before him.

Zagonyi was ever at the front. His potent sword, which had won renown on the battle-fields of Hungary, was carving a way for freedom and the Union. The guard looked to him, as he had said, and followed where he led.

The Confederates recoiled. Just why it was so is hard to say. They were brave men themselves, mostly of the same grand stock as the guard, but something was lacking in them.

It may have seemed to them that that little band was more than human.

Driven back, beset with such fierceness, the Confederates lost heart and turned their backs. The cover of the wood was at their rear, and toward this the infantry went at full speed, never pausing until under the shelter of the trees.

A portion of the guard had engaged the enemy, and turned upon them. It began to look as though victory would be theirs, but the odds were still four to one, even greater than most military commands would dare to engage.

"Fremont and the Union!"

With the old cry, the guard precipitated itself on the fresh foe. Horse met horse, sabers clashed, revolvers cracked, and the rival commands were in a death-grapple. They surged from side to side. The guard had met a foe well prepared for work than the infantry, and for awhile the result was in doubt, but slowly but surely the Confederates were pushed back.

Zagonyi afterward said that he had seen charges, but never one like that. So, too, an admirer might almost be pardoned if he said that never before did young soldiers fight as then. Their blows were crushing, and even in the heat of battle, they remembered their boyish teaching.

Steadily they drove the Confederates back until the latter must have thought them demons; and before that destructive pressure, the cavalry lost heart, as the infantry had done, recoiled, abandoned themselves to confusion and fled.

They were sharply followed. The infantry had been allowed to go where they pleased, but against the troopers the guard hurled themselves persistently, resolved not to leave enough to make another stand.

Their work was well done.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE CAPTURED TOWN.

When the guard struck the cavalry, Sergeant Barlow was on the right flank. He looked for Sharpshot, who had heretofore been near him, but saw nothing of the scout. One moment he wondered what had become of him, the next he saw the shock came.

At the battle-cry, Zagonyi frequently glanced over the field to see how the fight was going, and in this way his attention became fixed for a moment upon one of the Confederates who was dashing about and wielding a saber with perfect fury.

There was something so wild and eccentric in the movements of the man, so out of order with all the rules of service, that Barlow could not but look repeatedly.

At the battle-cry, Zagonyi dashed again and again, dealing heavy blows, but seldom pausing to follow them up, and every now and then, dealing little damage, while, over and anon, he uttered a discordant screech which may or may not have been a battle-cry.

Barlow was unable to understand it.

Gradually, it dawned upon him that there was something familiar about the man. Face, form and manner, seemed like some echo from the past—where had he seen him before?

"Hah!" he remembered him at last; the strange horseman was Yeaton, the madman

he had fought in the secret room of the man-servant near the Osage.

He had barely made this discovery when a surge of the fight brought them near each other. Then, something drew Yeaton's gaze to him and his eyes flashed with the old, mad light.

"Ha! ha!" he laughed, wildly, "so I have you again! I've been hunting for you many a day. I've found you at last, and I'll make you dead man inside of three seconds. Take that!"

He accompanied the last word with a vicious blow of his sabre. Barlow easily parried it, and gave back blow for blow. Their sabers clashed, and though their dueling showed little of the rare skill he had shown in their former encounter, the contest waxed hot.

Yeaton's horse was a fiery, mettlesome charger, ill-suited for the business, and many strokes were thus thrown away, but the affair had a decidedly business-like air.

Barlow, however, remembered that this man was insane, and the father of one to whom he already owed a great debt of gratitude.

"Mr. Yeaton," he said, "this is no place for you. I implore you, return to the rear, and not risk your life in a useless fight. Where is your son?"

"What is that to you?" was the fierce reply. "What is that to me? When sons turn against their sires, it is time for sires to fight. Ha! dog in Union blue, I doubt not but that you have a father somewhere loaded down with chains. My curse on the age!"

"Will you go back?" repeated Barlow, "is your life of no value? Go, and save it!"

"Ha! ha! you fear me, dog, you fear me. Good! I'll show you what the old man can do!"

He pressed forward with hot words and hotter blows, but even while his sabre was raised for a stroke he suddenly paused, dropped the weapon, swayed in the saddle and then went headlong to the ground.

Barlow looked down and saw a red stream flowing over his hair, and then he realized that a chance shot, fired by his own friends, had entered his head and ended his career forever.

He had died fighting for the Confederate cause he loved so well.

Barlow had no time to look for his remains. The surge of battle bore him away, and when a little later, the foe fled, he had other thoughts on his mind.

The guard had the ground as victors. Of the enemy, horse and foot had taken flight—the two thousand had been dispersed by the hundred and fifty.

But where were the hundred and fifty? The remnant of the guard at that moment gathered around Zaganyi did not count more than half that number. The other half lay dead or wounded along the red line which stretched from the beginning of the lane to the place of final victory.

The battle had been won—gloriously won, but it seemed as though at a fearful cost. Only one half left! Seventy brave men dead or dying—but the loss might not be so severe after all. Others might yet be found alive.

Zaganyi looked at his braces in mingled joy and sadness. A great triumph had been achieved, but many a face was absent at that moment. Chamberlain, Becker, Schneider, Morrison, Vanway—where were they?

Zaganyi could hardly find words to address the survivors, but he managed to express his sentiments, and the guard showed that they were still with him in thought, word and deed.

They were covered with blood and smoke, their blue uniforms were cut and soiled, but on their warrior faces was the old, brave look their leader had seen before the grand charge.

Where in the history of our country is there anything that goes before that day's work?

Against overwhelming odds they had won a fight which, when flashed along the wires to the North, thrilled every patriot's heart with joy and pride.

Fremont's body-guard had proved its right to be called war-soldiers; more, they had proved their right to be called heroes.

Zaganyi and the remnant and set their faces toward the town. It was practically captured; he felt sure no armed resistance would meet them there, and he knew that many Union people would hail their arrival with joy.

Sergeant Barlow was not among those

who formed for the advance. Where, then, was he?

A little before, when they were pursuing the fleeing cavalry, a horseman had dashed to his side and, through the stalts of battle he recognized Sharpshot.

"Quiekt! This way, Max!" said the scout. "I've seen the whole crew, and I've seen the girls. Keeler and Sam Stiles are carrying them off. Quick, I say, and we will save them yet!"

Barlow needed no second bidding. He forgot then that he might be neglecting his official duty—he forgot all except the fact that the moment he was in peril, and brave soldier though he was, his heart was as tender as that of a woman.

Few truly brave men are otherwise. Many do not yield to the tender passion, but even they respect and admire the sex that refines and elevates them.

As they went the two, Max and the scout, and as they rode, the latter explained what he knew.

Keeler had been with the infantry, accompanied by his men, but they had been curtailed by the Confederate leader and obliged to keep at their posts. Thus, the guerrilla chief kept out of danger, but he had at first been tempted to disregard orders and sweep down on the guard.

When, however, he saw the Confederate go to pieces, he realized that the day was lost. He and Stiles had made arrangements for leaving Springfield the following night, taking Olive and Lena with them, but he had not had an idea that the guard would win the day.

Seeing that it was so to be, he sent two men to take the girls from the house and make way on the safest road, and after a little delay, he and Stiles set out to join them.

Thus it was that Sharpshot, while scouting, chanced to see the girls in company with Keeler, Stiles and the other two men. They were leaving town by the Osceola road, and Sharpshot knew that only quick work would prevent the guerrilla from getting them more completely in his power.

Across the field went the pursuers, heading straight for the Osceola road, and the two horses jaded as they were, covered the ground in fine style.

It did not take them long to reach the road, and then, a mile ahead, they saw the party they were seeking. Keeler had sent his band by another route, intending to cage his prisoners and join his men afterward, so it happened that he had but three with his unwilling lady companions.

"We've got 'em sure," said Sharpshot, exultantly.

"I'm not so sure of that."

"Why not?"
The horses are jaded by a fifty mile march, and a hard fight, while theirs are probably fresh."

"But our stock is better nor their'n, or it should be. Thar ain't many horses in Missouri ekur ter the guard's, an' our'n are among the best."

Keeler's men rode good stock the night they chased us across the Osage, and they probably have the same among the Ozark Mountains."

"Mebbe you are right, sergeant, but we will soon see."

The horses speeded rapidly along the Osceola road, always watching the cloud of dust ahead which betrayed the position of the women-stealers, and their own horses were going nobly. Their speed was something to wonder at, after all they had endured, but as Sharpshot had said, there was no better stock in Missouri.

During the first mile of the chase there was no perceptible change in their relative positions, but Barlow, seeing they did not gain any, grew despondent. If the pursued could hold their own for awhile, the tired horses of the Unionists must surely give way.

Sharpshot, too, seemed to see the danger, but it only served to put his wits to work.

"Sergeant," he said, "I've got an idee."

"What is it?"
The road bends above hyar, as you know, an' if they stick to it, why can't I make a dash through the woods in a straight line an' head 'em off?"

"Sure enough; I did not think of that. We will both go."

"No."

"Why not?"
The varmints know they are pursued, an' o' course, are watchin' us. Ef we both disappear, they will suspect the truth, an', turnin' off somwhar, easly get out o' our way."

"You are right there, but, even if you do get ahead of them, what can you do? They are four, you, but one."

"We took bigger odds when the guard charged. I don't ye' fear for me, sergeant. You know I kin sil' lead 'em some, but you don't know how much. Let me an' them pison varmints, an' I'll make 'em howl."

"Have your way," said Barlow, "but, I implore you, do not risk too much. Your life is too valuable to be thrown away. Your hand, Sharpshot!"

They crossed palms, riding at a gallop, looked steadily into each other's eyes; then a smile crossed the face of the sharpshooter.

"Hear ye part," he said, "but we shall meet again. Don't get the blues on my account. I've come through many a close rub, an' I'm good fur more. Good-day!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

A DESPERATE DUEL.

With the last word the scout dropped Barlow's hand, and turned toward the bushes. He urged his horse from the road, its feet touched the leaves and dry sticks of the wood proper, Sharpshot turned and waved a farewell—then he was gone.

Barlow looked after him with very friendly eyes.

"Brave fellow!" he muttered, "nothing is too risky for him to dare. I don't know what will come of this latest venture, but it almost seems as though he bears a charmed life. Oh! why can't I ride down those fellows in front?"

He rode to his horse with a guilty feeling for he knew the noble animal was already doing all that could justly be asked of it; but his master must not stand in the way of this latest adventure.

He watched the cloud of dust closely, fearing that the guerrillas would in some way slip out of his fingers, but never pausing to reflect that, if they turned at bay, they would be four to one against him.

What signifies odds when a soldier rides to aid the woman he loves?

And Sharpshot—what of him? He had quickly disappeared from Barlow's sight and hearing, but he was working manfully to accomplish his undertaking. His way was all through the wood which, though for the most part open, now and then dropped a bunch in his path which compelled him to bend low to avoid a collision.

He had set his mind on cutting off the guerrillas, and we have already seen that he was a man of resolution. When he left Max, it was with the expectation that he would have to encounter the whole four of the enemy, and if it came to that he would not be particular about the way he dealt with them.

No outrays of our country, before or since the war, were more lawless than Keeler's band had been. As we have before said, he had the desire for plunder, not the good of the Southern Confederacy, in his mind, and he was cordially feared and detested by all classes in the Ozark region.

For a long while he had plundered indiscriminately, but the Confederate generals had finally sent him such positive warning that he ceased to openly annoy the sympathizers with the cause, though he still remained a robber.

Against such a man any hostile act would be fair, while of the men at this time with him Sam Stiles was as bad as he, and the other two showed their material by the company they kept.

For half an hour Sharpshot rode at full speed, and then, without pausing, looked carefully to his weapons. He was nearing the Osceola road, and, unless the kidnappers had gone faster than he thought, an encounter would soon come.

He rode into the traveled way, and stopped his tired horse.

The road lay white and dusty before him, but it was by trees, but as far as he could see, no other person was visible. He leaped from his saddle and looked at the ground. No fresh tracks were visible, and he knew the guerrillas had not passed.

Looking along the road, in the direction of Springfield, he saw a single horseman approaching. One glance was enough to show him that it was not one of Keeler's men. The unknown wore citizen's garments, and was riding along leisurely; his air was not that of a fugitive.

Sharpshot looked at him keenly. He would have taken the cover for him to pass, but the attention of the stranger was already upon him, and he stood still.

A little later the scout started slightly. He

had recognized the man; he was the younger Yeaton, who had already done so much for at least one of our friends.

He reached where Sharpshot stood, and the recognition was mutual.

"Evenin', Mr. Yeaton, evenin'," he finally said. "Out for an airin'?"

"Out for my health," answered the Confederate grinner, "out of Springfield, I mean. Zagouri and the guard have made it to hot hell for wearers of the gray."

Sharpshot smiled, and then grew grave.

"I'm glad ter see you, partner, fur I have somethin' ter say. Are you in a hurry?"

"No."

"Then let me talk ter you a bit."

The scout rode nearer, and began speaking rapidly and earnestly. What he said will be told in due time; suffice it to say, for now, that the conversation of the Confederates ate to the end; and when he had finished, Yeaton held out his hand frankly.

"You can count on me; I am with you," he earnestly said.

They still stood with clasped hands, when, looking down the road, Sharpshot saw Keeler and his prisoners approaching. All were there, the two girls and the four captors, and the scouts had grown stern and silent. "The decisive moment is at hand," he said. "Either I win now, against odds, or die with my face to the wall."

"It is a great risk——" began Yeaton.

"I will give it so," was the firm answer.

"I beg of you, do not interfere."

The guerrillas and their prisoners approached. Sharpshot and Yeaton sat on their horses in their path. Keeler regarded them sharply, but said nothing, content to remain silent, for neither of them wore a uniform, and he had not recognized them.

Sharpshot put out one hand.

"Wait a moment, Captain Keeler," he said. "I have a word to say to you."

"Be quick, then," was the gruff reply.

"I'm in haste."

"So I see. Women stealers usually are in a hurry."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply that I know you and your prisoners, and that I am here as your enemy. If you go on, outlaw, you must fight your way."

"I reckon we can do that," Keeler answered, with a sneer. "I see no formidable obstacle. But who are you that gets in my way so rashly?"

"The man you hung in the wood near the Osage."

"The devil!" ejaculated the guerrilla. He had previously learned that the attempted execution had been a failure, and when Sharpshot revealed his identity he remembered him well. So homely a man as the spy was not easily forgotten.

"You attempted to hang me that night and failed. Now, I am here to square the account, and to take your prisoners away."

Keeler laughed.

"You have assurance enough, at anyrate. Do you see that we are four against two?"

"I am willing to risk greater odds. Listen to my proposition: I am a man of deeds, not of words; as I will convince you; so I make this offer: I will fight three of you on horseback, our weapons to be revolvers. You shall retire somewhere and leave your prisoners in charge of your fourth man; then the other three shall dash toward me. I will meet you half way, and then let our quarrel be settled by bullets. What do you say?"

It was an idea such as few, as a fugitive, shou'd have rejected, as a far quicker way would have been to force the fighting as they were then; but, villain though he was, he was a brave man, and was forcibly impressed by the proposition.

He turned to Sam Stiles, who was looking on, and held a brief consultation.

Meanwhile, Sharpshot looked at the girls, who were too far back to hear what was said. He met their gaze, and it seemed to nerve him for the great effort. Better that he leave his body in the road than that the innocent captives of these lawless men.

Keeler turned abruptly to the sharpshooter.

"Accept your proposition," he said.

"Then let each party retire until we are a hundred yards apart. At the signal, to be given by yourself, we will dash toward each other and fire as we see fit. But, I warn you do not try to bring your muskets. I will not brook any treachery."

"Rest easy," said the guerrilla, haughtily.

"We're not afraid to fight as we have agreed."

Both parties retreated until a hundred yards lay between them. Yeaton spoke

earnestly to Sharpshot. The latter remained as cool as ever. He was going to risk his life against odds, but it was not in his nature to fear any fear.

Keeler gave the signal, and the deadly enemies shot toward each other at a gallop. Sharpshot held a revolver in each hand, while in his belt were two more, the property of Yeaton.

The latter watched anxiously. It was a strange fact, but only one of the peculiarities of war, that all his sympathy was with the single man and against those who wore the gray of the cause he loathed so well.

Around the original point the dust rolled up, but did not conceal their movements. He saw Sharpshot sitting boldly in his saddle, and scarcely breathed as he looked for the next move in the game.

The scout had said that his revolvers would carry much further than an ordinary weapon of the kind; why did he not use them before it was too late?

Ha! a crack, a puff of smoke, and down goes the unnamed rider of the guerrilla trio. Sharpshot has selected the lesser villain of the three, for his first victim and struck well. The man does not arise, and is plainly out of the affair.

Then the fight begins in earnest. The ice is broken, Keeler and Stiles begin a rapid fusillade, and the revolvers make warlike music.

At first there is little danger for the bold scout, for the distance is too great for any but such marksmen as he, but every bound of the horses takes them nearer together, and Yeaton holds his breath.

Sharpshot wastes no lead. He is a man of steely coolness; he knows its value, and knows, too, that he is a dead shot.

He lets the lead whistle past his head, dashing death, until such time as he is sure of his next victim. He knows the fight will soon be decided, probably before they close; but he realizes that, in the foolish way the guerrillas are firing, the only danger is from a chance shot.

Keeler pulls the trigger again. His hand is steady, his aim sure, and at the crack, Keeler reeks in his saddle, clutching blindly at the air and falls to the ground. One foot clings in the stirrup, and the frightened horse, starting, drags him a few yards before he falls free.

By that time more work has been done. Sharpshot, with only one foe before him, dashes straight ahead, and comes very near each other, at last, and Stiles raises his revolver for a sure, steady shot. He is disturbed by the fall of his companion, and realizes that he is in peril, but he hopes to end all by that shot; so he covers the heart of the Union scout.

CHAPTER XXX.

CONCLUSION.

Sharpshot saw his danger and was equal to the emergency. He had the use of those rare nerves which enable a man to remain as cool in the hour of battle as in times of peace, and his hand had not forgot its cunning.

As Sam Stiles was about to pull the trigger, the scout's revolver spoke for the third time.

Surely aimed the shot had been, for, as it rang out, the guerrilla's own revolver fell to the ground, and his arm fell helplessly to his side.

Another moment and Sharpshot was beside him, and the deadly revolver was pressing against his temple.

"Surrender!" cried the scout, in a thrilling voice. "Yield, as you hope for life!"

"Drop your shooter," said Stiles, surly, but with praiseworthy coolness. "My arm is broken short off."

"So it seems; but you have a left hand and other revolvers in your belt. I'll relieve you of them before you do harm."

He suited the action to the word, and Stiles sat before him a helpless prisoner, while Yeaton galloped rapidly toward the spot.

Just then a shout sounded from down the road, and they looked to see the fourth guerrilla fleeing before the rush of Max Barlow.

A revolver cracked, and down fell the man. The quartet was cleared of the scene.

Barlow paused before Olive and Lena, but Sharpshot, his face still stern, turned to Yeaton.

"Will you watch this man while I take a look at Keeler?" he asked.

"Certainly. Go ahead."

Sharpshot went, but the chief was beyond knowing him. He was still breathing, but consciousness had forever fled. Seeing this, the scout turned away.

Barlow, Olive and Lena had advanced to the side of Stiles and Yeaton, and the sergeant was shaking the noble Confederate by the hand. The girls looked on, joy in their faces, and the color gradually creeping back to their cheeks.

Sharpshot joined them.

"Ain't you got sairy a welcome far me?" he asked, with assumed mien.

"Do you think we could welcome such a looking outfit?" demanded Barlow, laughing. "You ought to look at yourself in a glass. Your face is as striped as a zebra's, and your red wig is on awry. My good fellow, you may as well cast off your disguise, now."

Max spoke in a happy way, and Yeaton, who had been looking closely, suddenly started.

"By my life!" he said, "I believe that I, too, know you. Has the grave given up its dead? Are you Edgar Peterson?"

"I don't know that the grave has any share in the work, but I am Edgar Peterson!"

With these words, Sharpshot cast off his false beard and his wig, rubbed away a good deal of the brown stain on his face—which had become streaked through abundant perspiration—and stood before them very much like the Edgar Peterson of the old days, only more erect and manly.

Barlow caught his hand warmly.

"Twenty-four hours ago this would have amazed me, but now I am not surprised," he said.

"When did you first suspect?"

"Just before the guard made their charge. You forgot yourself then, in your intensity, and spoke in your natural voice. I was sure it was you, but I kept my peace and resolved to wait until the proper time."

"I knew you suspected me then, but, as I was about to throw off the mask, cared nothing for it."

"What in the world induced you to adopt such a role?"

"To hide myself," said Peterson. "It is easy to tell you why. You know that I used to be a miserable, worthless drunkard, and you know what aroused the manhood within me. It was the beginning of war—and other things."

He gazed at Lena, whose fair face was full of joy, and Barlow nodded quickly.

"I understand all that," he said.

"When I swore never again to touch liquor, and to do my utmost for the Union," continued Edgar, "it occurred to me that I ought to prove myself a man before asking other men to trust me. Sharpshot was the outgrowth of that idea. I assumed the disguise, telling only one person of my resolve."

He gazed again at Lena, and she smiled broadly at his face.

"I was in every way fitted for the character I assumed. I was a fine marksman, a good trailer, and experienced in all kinds of border warfare. I put on a wig, a false beard, and stained my face with berry-juice, and even Lena did not at first recognize me. I sought action and found it, first, in General Lyon, at Boonville, next, I was with Sigel, near where I met you and, afterward, at Wilson's Creek. At these scenes I did my best for the Union cause, and, in this way, obtained the favor of the generals, and recommendations which afterward served me when I sought service with General Fremont.

"All was not clear sailing, however. I had an enemy in the person of Sam Stiles, who, I may as well explain, tried to win Lena Somers for his wife. Before your band, Barlow, marched to join Sigel, Stiles and Keeler and the latter wrote a letter betraying your plans. This letter was intended to ruin me, as Keeler imitated my writing wonderfully well."

"Now, I come to the lynching affair. Stiles was resolved to have my life, so, still being in your band, he led the mob against me. I was hung by the neck; but just then a dash of Keeler's gunpowder drove away the lynchers—and out of their part which Keeler and Stiles afterward soundly cursed—and I was left hanging."

"I was near my death then, but at the critical moment, Lena appeared and cut me down. She brought me back to consciousness, and then I made a resolution. From that hour Edgar Peterson should be one dead to all but her until the scout, Sharpshot, had proved himself a man."

"So I made her promise to remain silent, even to Olive and Lena, and she kept her word while I went to see Sharpshot. You, Barlow, and others were much perplexed by my disappearance, but I was usually near you, and

my disguise was so perfect that, with my changed voice and a peculiar twist I gave my countenance, you did not recognize me."

"You remember I asked you several times where we had met before," said Max.

"So you did," answered Edgar, laughing, "and you could not remember the disguise. Now, as you already know that it was Keeler and Stiles who tried to kill you in St. Louis, and that the mysterious letter you received was written by Mr. Yeaton, as true a man as ever lived, I will pass on to the ghost you saw in the wood."

"Keeler, little suspecting that I was Edgar Peterson, tried to hang me as a spy, but I escaped through the aid of a Union man who was masquerading in the band. The affair, however, disengaged me from Barlow, and I went to St. Louis to arrange them. At that moment you came up and saw what you thought was the ghost of Edgar Peterson, and, having discovered you, in turn, I made certain gestures to heighten the impression, and then vanished as soon as the moon clouded."

"But you were terribly pale."

"All your fancy, my dear fellow, for you know ghosts ought to be pale. Very likely, too, the moonlight had something to do with it; and the hanging affair may have taken away some color, even as my rough experience had when away a good deal of the Sharpshot stain."

"But you rascal, you told me you believed in ghosts, and had seen them," said Barlow, in assumed anger.

"I took delight in bothering you," said Edgar, laughing lightly; then, growing serious; "now, Max, you know who Sharpshot is, and I ask you fairly, have I proved my right to be called a man?"

"You have, nobly and fully," said Barlow.

"I have not touched a drop of liquor for five months, and I never shall again. After this expedition is over, I shall cast aside my

role of the sharpshooter and apply for service in my real character. I hope to make my name honored!"

"Heaven guard that you may!" added Yeaton.

Not much longer did they stay in the wood. They bade farewell to Yeaton, and, with Stiles as a prisoner, set out on their return to Springfield.

When Barlow left the guard, he believed the fighting was over, but some of the Confederates still showing a bold front, they were assailed, driven back into the town, fought in the streets and finally utterly routed.

Zagonyi had won the place, and the Unionists came out to hail them as deliverers. Men cheered, and women waved their handkerchiefs—all were glad to see the men who had made so grand a charge.

When Barlow, Edgar, and the two sisters arrived, they found a scene of rejoicing, while none were happier than Olive and Lena.

There, we will leave them. Many pages more might be written of the subsequent adventures of Max and Edgar, but with the triumph of the latter, our story may well end.

Soon after, Springfield was occupied by Fremont's army. Olive and Lena were sent under a safe escort to St. Louis, where they remained to the end of the war. Their father, too, was with them, for, after his recovery, he had no desire to live on the contested ground.

Barlow and Peterson served faithfully to the end of the great war and both won renown. No reproach ever fell on the record of the latter after he had nobly cleared his name; and when the struggle ended, he returned to St. Louis, it was to meet the undying love of Lena.

We need scarcely add that they then united their fortunes for life, or that, at

the same time, Olive became the bride of Max Barlow.

Sam Stiles made a full confession, language and action were exchanged; and then, in his first fight, received a wound from which he died, a week later.

Yeaton served the cause he loved to the end of the war, and if he was in the wrong, he believed himself right. He was a noble fellow, and his Union friends were glad to know, in the peace that followed the war, that he was on the old plantation, and a happy man.

General Fremont, Major Zagonyi and the guard, much more might be written, but they are characters of history, and their lives and virtues properly bring.

The guard had lost heavily at Springfield, but when the wounded had recovered, and the prisoners been regained, the actual loss, in dead, was but seventeen, and that, too, in a charge against such overwhelming odds.

Turn where the reader will in the pages of history, nothing more grand than that day's work can be found. The charge they made will live in memory for many years to come, and let the generations that live in the future, give all honor to those noble men, the heroes of the Civil War.

And let no one forget Zagonyi, the hero of two continents, the brave Hungarian who unsheathed his sword for our Union, for to him belongs honor and unbound respect.

Brave General Fremont, whom men call the "Pathfinder"—what of him? The man who crossed the heart of the continent, who climbed the Rocky Mountains through ice and snow, for his country's good; and who afterward stood so firmly for the same cause when the Union was menaced—he is ours, to honor and admire, while the nation lives.

And so we leave them all, for our story is told, adding, only, that we wish all happiness and honor to those who were in various ways connected with the guard.

THE END.

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